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THE INDIAN BUCCANEER; or, RED ROVERS ON BLUE WATERS.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "WILD BILL, THE PISTOL DEAD SHOT,"
"WILD BILL'S GOLD TRAIL," ETC., ETC.



THERE STOOD THE INDIAN BUCCANEER, CALM AND FEARLESS, WHILE HE PILOTED HIS GALLANT CRAFT THROUGH THE VERY JAWS OF DEATH.

The Indian Buccaneer;

OR,

Red Rovers on Blue Waters.

A Story of Sea Mysteries.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

STORM-BEATEN.

A SMALL pleasure-craft was gliding swiftly along, over the island-studded waters near Portland, Maine, and heading for the land-locked harbor of that city.

A brisk wind was blowing at the time from the northeast, while rolling up from the westward were wicked-looking storm-clouds, black as night, and tossing about in the skies in a way that showed that a fierce wind was urging them on.

Upon the little vessel were three persons, an elderly gentleman at the tiller and two maidens.

The face of the helmsman wore an anxious look, as he saw the rising clouds, and he often turned his eyes toward the islands not far distant, but which were reef-guarded, so as to prevent refuge there.

He was a man whose face was darkly bronzed, stern and unbending, evidently older than he seemed, for only upon either temple were gray hairs beginning to mingle with the black.

Tall, commanding in presence, he had the air of one reared in refinement and wealth.

The young girls who were with him were both of them beautiful in face and graceful in form, and yet as different as sunlight and darkness, for the one was a pronounced brunette, the other a perfect blonde.

They were dressed neatly in yachting-suits, wore sun hats, and were evidently boon companions; in fact they were schoolmates, the blonde being the guest of the brunette, who was home for the summer vacation, from her boarding-school in Boston.

Doctor Rufus Rowland, he who guided the little vessel on her way, was a resident of Portland.

He had come there some ten years before, not to practice his profession, but to enjoy the great wealth of which he was the possessor.

He was a widower, with but one child, Ruth, and in her his life seemed to center.

He had courted no society, and seemed frigid in his bearing toward those who sought him out; but, as Ruth grew in years he unbent a little from his stern bearing, and now and then invited a select set to his superb mansion that overlooked the harbor, and whose grounds sloped to the water's edge.

His daughter he sent, when she reached the age of fourteen, to a fashionable boarding-school in Boston, and upon her return home during vacation she was wont to bring her room-mate and particular friend, Vivian Moreland, with her.

When presented to the reader, as they were hurrying home from an afternoon sail upon the island-dotted waters above the city, Ruth was in her seventeenth year, and Vivian a year her senior, and both of them were the admiration of all who saw them.

Feeling that he had a precious charge to care for, and that the little boat contained all that was dear to him, it was no wonder that Doctor Rowland was anxious to reach port.

He was a good sailor, but human skill could do little in a frail craft, against the storm then threatening, as he well knew.

Did he know the channels into the islands, he might seek them; but not being acquainted with them, to attempt to find a haven there would be fully as dangerous as holding on and meeting the blow.

The little yacht was a new one, and it was her trial trip, in which she had not given satisfaction to her owner, for she was what a seaman would call "cranky."

"Father, that storm rises rapidly, does it not?" said Ruth quietly, glancing at the rising storm-clouds.

"Yes, my child, and I fear we will be caught in the blow, so rig yourselves in your storm-coats," was the answer.

The maidens were soon prepared for a wetting, and Ruth held the helm while her father drew on his storm-coat.

Hardly had he done so, when a vivid glare of lightning, rather than a flash, seemed to momentarily set earth and water on fire, while a crash of thunder followed that rocked the little boat as though the sea had been rent by an earthquake.

With a cry of alarm Vivian Moreland threw herself down in the bottom of the boat; but Ruth, though deadly pale, did not flinch.

Doctor Rowland's hand did not quiver, as it held the tiller, but through his shut teeth came the lowly uttered words:

"My God! we are face to face with death!"

After the first flash and peal that broke upon

them, the vivid, forked lightning cut the Heavens continually, and the roar and rustle of the thunder was terrific.

Then came the howling of the tempest, and in the distant town a steeple was seen to fall, flying debris filled the air, and clouds of dust then shut out the sight.

Springing forward Doctor Rowland lowered his sail, dropped anchor and began to furl the canvas with all speed, in which he was aided by Ruth, while Vivian Moreland still crouched helpless in the bottom of the boat.

"See, father! see that wall of foam," cried Ruth as the storm swept over the hill, down upon the waters, and drove before it a chaotic mass of waves and spray.

Wild shouts came from the distant city, stern orders were heard from the shipping in the harbor, crashing of timbers, snapping of rigging, and the shrieking of the winds, all together, added to the roaring waters, the peals of thunder and flashing lightning, making up a Pandemonium that was fearful.

"Hold hard!" cried Doctor Rowland, as he saw the storm was almost upon them.

"Look there! oh, see there!"

The cry came from Vivian Moreland, as she was crouching down in the cockpit, grasping the combing for support.

The eyes of Doctor Rowland and Ruth followed where she pointed, and they beheld a long white skiff coming toward them rapidly, and with but a single occupant, who sent it flying along with the strong strokes of his paddle.

The skiff was nearly up to them, but they could see no more, for the storm was now upon them in all its fury.

An instant of suspense, and then the wall of foam lifted their frail craft upon its bosom, the anchor-chains snapped like cords, the mast was wrenched loose, and went flying off with the sail, while the dismasted hull was hurled over and over and its occupants were at the mercy of the waters, struggling for life against desperate odds in favor of death.

CHAPTER II.

NICK, THE LIGHT-HOUSE BOY.

"My God! and this is the end?"

The cry came from the lips of Doctor Rowland, as he arose to the surface, after being torn from his hold upon the boat, and found himself in the mad waters.

"Ho, sir! swim this way."

The tones were manly and firm, and the doctor turned quickly from his agonized search for his daughter, to behold only a few yards from him the long white skiff which he had seen an instant before the storm struck them.

It was dancing wildly about upon the waters now, but he gave a cry of joy as he beheld its single occupant drawing on board the form of his daughter Ruth.

At the same moment a mass of red-gold hair dashed into his face, and he grasped Vivian Moreland in his strong arms.

The poor girl was unconscious, but Doctor Rowland swam toward the skiff with her as well as he could, while he cried:

"Thank God! there is hope arisen out of despair."

As soon as he had drawn Ruth on board, the oarsman seized his paddle and sent his skiff toward the doctor and his precious charge.

Ruth, who was in the full possession of her faculties and perfectly calm, then said:

"You steady her, sir, with your paddle, and I will aid them on board."

"Thank you, miss, but I fear they will be too heavy for you," was the answer.

But just then Ruth grasped the hand of Vivian, and holding to it firmly, while her father aided her, she drew the limp form into the skiff, while a wave tore the doctor loose, and he sunk from sight.

"Here, miss, take the paddle and keep her head so, and I will save him," cried the daring oarsman, and he sprang into the sea.

An instant of fearful suspense to poor Ruth, who held the skiff's head to the sea, and the two appeared, her father held firmly in the arms of the brave swimmer, and seemingly dazed.

Grasping him firmly by the shoulders, she, with the assistance of their brave rescuer, drew him into the skiff; for a cut upon his forehead showed where he had struck his head against the side of the boat and been half-stunned by the blow, so that he was unable to help himself.

Ere she could lend a helping hand to the one who had so fearlessly come to their aid, he was on board, and seizing the paddle, was flying away before the gale in the direction of the islands.

Through the reef-guarded channels the boat seemed to fly, now shaving a huge rock, now rounding another, and then holding on a zig-zag course that showed that he who guided her knew well its trimmings.

Ruth sat in the bottom of the boat, the head of Vivian in her lap, while Doctor Rowland, now restored to perfect consciousness, eagerly watched the bold pilot, as he held on his way.

Vivian too soon revived from her swoon, but said little, and in silence the three gazed at the oarsman.

Suddenly he drew out of the skiff a small mast and sail, and in spite of the blow, soon had it set, and under its impulse the seemingly frail craft fairly flew over the rough waters.

Out of the island channels it went, and its course was toward a huge rock upon which a small stone hut was standing, over one end of which was a low tower which served as a light-house.

"Are you going to the light-house?" asked Doctor Rowland, as they left the islands astern.

"Yes, sir, for I could not beat into port against this storm, and it is likely to continue all night."

"We have an humble home, sir, for we are poor people, but my mother and myself will make you welcome in it, such as it is," was the answer.

"Are you not Nick, the Light-house Boy?" asked Ruth eagerly.

"Yes, miss, they call me so, but my name is Nicholas Burton."

"The spray has blinded my eyes so that I did not recognize you; and then, too, it has been six years since last I saw you."

"Do you not know me?"

"Yes, miss, I remember you; but I have been to sea for five years, since I saw you, and only came back six months ago when my father died, and my mother needed me to look after the light-house for her."

"Father, do you not know this young man?" asked Ruth earnestly.

"He is the boy that shot the dog that sprung upon you, one day in the streets, and who refused the money I sent him, is he not?" asked Doctor Rowland.

"Yes, Doctor Rowland, I am the boy who refused gold for the service I rendered your daughter," was the haughty reply.

"And, I dare say, will refuse pay now for your services in rescuing us?"

"I certainly shall, sir, for I did but my duty."

"Is it your duty to risk your life for those you do not know, and who are able to pay for your services?"

"I did know you, sir, for I saw your daughter from the island, where I had gone to shoot game, and so put out to your aid; but I did it from a sense of duty I owe my fellow-beings, and not for gold, and I must beg of you, sir, not to offer my mother a reward for her hospitality to you."

"You think she will accept?" sneered Doctor Rowland.

"On the contrary, she will consider it an insult, sir, for though we are poor, we do not trade in the misfortunes of others."

"You are a strange boy," said Doctor Rowland, struck by the manliness of the youth, and gazing into his face with evident admiration.

He was scarcely twenty years of age, tall and well-formed for his years, and with a face strikingly fearless and resolute, while he was certainly very handsome, and his bearing almost haughty.

He was dressed in a sailor suit, wore a jaunty tarpaulin upon his head, which did not hide the dark ringlets that clustered about his temples and fell upon his shoulders.

The long skiff was a life-boat, with only a small cockpit in it, and, light as a cork, it rode the rough waters like one, so that Doctor Rowland saw that he had nothing more to fear from the storm while the young helmsman held the tiller.

As they neared the bleak rock upon which the light-house stood they saw that there was an air of comfort about it which they had not expected to find.

There was a little basin, just large enough for several small boats, a flower-garden, a few sturdy pine trees, a shed full of wood, already cut and neatly piled up, and the store-house of four rooms, with a snug porch on the sea and land sides.

Upon the one looking landward stood a woman, watching the approach of the skiff, and, as it drew nearer, she waved her kerchief in welcome.

She had a matronly face, kind and gentle, and was dressed in deep black.

She met the skiff, as it darted into the little basin, and said earnestly:

"Welcome back, my brave boy, and thank God that you have done a noble act."

"Yes, mother, I have been so fortunate as to save this gentleman and these ladies, whose craft went down."

"Doctor Rowland and ladies, this is my mother, Mistress Burton."

The doctor politely raised his hat, and said:

"You have a brave son, madam, and we owe our lives to him; but he shall not go unrewarded."

"His reward, sir, is in having done his duty," answered Mrs. Burton, somewhat coldly.

Doctor Rowland would have replied, but Ruth gave him an appealing look, while she said:

"We shall be forced to ask your hospitality, Mrs. Burton, for awhile."

"As long as you please, my dear young lady, for you are certainly welcome; but let me offer you dry clothing?"

"I think we had better try and return to the city, for the gale does not seem so severe, and I observe that your son has a stanch craft there in the basin," said the doctor.

"Yes, sir, I have often been out in her in a much worse gale than this, and if you think you must go, I can run you up to the city in safety," said Nick.

"I think it best," said Ruth, who seemed to fear that her father might say something to wound the feelings of the youth and his mother. After a cup of hot coffee, they boarded the little sloop, and at once stood out of the basin, with Nick at the helm, and headed over the wild waters for the harbor of Portland, just as darkness began to fall upon the sea.

CHAPTER III.

THE PIRATE.

MRS. BURTON stood on the little light-house porch, watching the departing sloop with a strange expression upon her face, which gradually explained itself in words:

"Proud as Lucifer, that man is, and he looks down upon all who are not his equals, and would pay them for services rendered.

"That then is the beautiful child whom Nick saved from the mad-dog years ago.

"Now she is budding forth into beautiful womanhood, and her nature is as noble as her father's is proud.

"Ah me! I fear I see trouble ahead for my poor son, for he has never forgotten that little girl, and when away at sea was wont to write me and ask if she was still in Portland.

"As she is now he will love her, and the result will be a broken heart, for, though his blood is as pure as her own, he is poor, and the haughty, stern doctor, would never give the hand of his daughter to a Light-house Boy.

"But, night is coming on, and I must light the lamps."

With this she entered the house and soon appeared in the little tower.

The curtains were drawn up, and the dazzling reflectors were soon gleaming under the light, as lamp after lamp was lit, and a cheerful beacon of hope was sent across the darkening waters.

"That will guide my boy back to me," said the fond mother as she descended to the first floor and set about making preparations to give him a welcome, with a warm fire, hot supper and dry clothing.

It was leagues up to the city, and hours would pass before he returned, she well knew; but she wanted to have all in readiness.

As she sat in the cheerful room, engaged in knitting, she suddenly started, for distinctly to her ears came a sound that caused her to turn pale.

"That was certainly the loud flapping of a vessel's sails, and near at hand.

"Merciful Heaven! Can the light have gone out?"

She sprung quickly to the tower, ran up the stone stairway, and found that the lamp still burned brightly.

But then, in the distance, when the glare fell upon it, yet dangerously near the island upon which stood the light-house, lay a large schooner under close-reefed sails.

It had evidently just luffed up into the wind, and the anchors were let fall as Mrs. Burton caught sight of it.

"The craft is crippled and has run under the lee of the island to ride out the storm; but Heaven have mercy on her, if the cables part, for her skipper has done a bold deed in coming to anchor there."

For some time she watched the vessel, and seeing that it seemed to ride quietly at its anchorage, she again descended to the little sitting-room and resumed her work, hardly hearing the howling winds and the roar of the waters, so accustomed was she to the sound.

An hour thus passed and then suddenly she heard a step on the stones without, and the latch of the door was raised.

"What! Can Nick be back so soon?" she cried, starting to her feet, to suddenly shrink back, as a tall, cloaked form entered, and a heavily-bearded stranger stood before her, his clothes wet with the sea spray.

Mrs. Burton was not only astounded, at the unlooked-for appearance of the stranger, but she was alarmed, for his coming there at that hour, and something about him, gave her cause for fear.

Starting back she stood beyond the shadows of the lamp, which now fell distinctly upon the intruder, revealing his face and form clearly.

He was heavily armed, as she saw, for the flaps of his cloak were thrown back upon either shoulder, revealing a cutlass, pistols and knife.

As she looked, there came over her face a look of horror, and it was evident that memory was bringing back from the buried past some strange, dread scene in her life.

Presently, from her lips came the words, hoarsely uttered:

"Gordon Burke!"

"Hal! who calls that name here?"

"Woman, did you utter the name of Gordon Burke?" he cried, savagely, advancing a step toward her.

"I did," she said, in a low tone.

"Who are you?" and springing forward he seized her by the arm and dragged her from the shadow where she stood into the glare of the lamp.

"Have the long years that have passed over my head, the sorrows that I have known, and the poverty, Gordon Burke, so changed me that you fail to recognize one whom you once professed to love?"

The words were spoken in a low, but distinct tone, and the eyes of the speaker were turned full upon the one she addressed.

His dark face turned livid, as he recognized her, and his broad breast heaved convulsively.

"Helen Burke, has the sea given up its dead?" he gasped forth in tones that seemed to quiver with terror.

"No, Gordon Burke, I am no ghost, but a reality.

"I am your cousin Helen, whom you were wont to say you loved, and wished to make your wife, but whom you learned to hate when you knew that she did not love you.

"No, no, I am the one whom you sought to destroy, that you might gain her fortune.

"I know all, Gordon Burke, and I have not forgotten how I had to recently marry Leo Burton, and fly with him, fearing you would prove treacherous and take his life.

"I preferred an humble home in America, with him, than to be mistress of my palatial inheritance in England, and so I fled with him.

"But you hired a man to take our lives, to wreck us in our flight in the little sloop and thus let us die; but your hireling, more merciful than his master, hailed an outward-bound vessel, put us on board, and wrecking the craft, as had been arranged, returned to you with the story that we had perished and received the blood-money you had promised him, while we, with the little gold we had saved up, came here and began life.

"We have both prospered and been unfortunate, and my husband's health failing, we came here, where he died, leaving me with only my son to cheer my declining years.

"As for your life, Gordon Burke, I know it too, for I am aware that, I being believed to be dead, you inherited the estate, being the next heir, and with it the title came to you.

"But, Lord Gordon of Burke Dell, you were born with an evil heart, you squandered your inheritance, or rather mine, you went rapidly to the bad, and one night, after you had come to the end of your gold, you took the life of the old butler who had served you so well, because he remonstrated with you on your evil course.

"Then you had to fly for your life, to return when another trusted old servant was dying, and through the secret held over him, caused him to confess that he had murdered the old butler and not you.

"He made that confession, Gordon Burke, and it cleared you of the charge of murder in many eyes, but not either my husband or myself believed it, for, knowing what you had been guilty of toward us and the secret that you held over your servant, we felt that you were guilty of the murder, and had forced the confession from him.

"Moneyless, you again disappeared, and I knew not what had become of you, but, in my heart I believed that you were dead, for I made up my mind this night to return to England, for the sake of my boy, and see if I could not get something out of my fortune which you wrecked, and give him the title which is justly his due."

The woman had reviewed the past of the man before her, in a low, distinct voice, while he, with a sneer upon his face, had stood with folded arms listening to her in perfect calmness and patience.

As she ceased speaking he said:

"So you have a son?"

"Yes, a noble boy."

"Doubtless, if he possesses his parents' virtues; but what is his age?"

"He will soon be twenty."

"Ah! and you wish him to get his title, and what may be left of the estate?"

"I had given up all thought of it, so much so, that he does not know he is of noble birth; but to-night, fearing that I saw sorrow ahead for him, I sat here plotting for his good, and am determined that he shall get what is his just dues."

"Well, the estate has improved in value all these years, Helen, and has paid off my debts, while the title is of course good.

"For these reasons I intended to return myself and take possession, now that I have a large fortune to add to the Burke Dell property, which I have gained by piracy."

"By piracy?" the poor woman gasped, staggering back to a chair and sinking into it.

"Yes, Helen, I am a pirate, and have been for nearly a score of years," was the calm reply of the man, and he smiled serenely as he noted the effect upon the woman of his self-confessed crime-stained life.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PIRATE'S CRIME.

"A PIRATE! so bad as that—so bad as that, and with my blood flowing in his veins? Oh, Gordon! Gordon Burke, what have you not to answer for in the life to come!"

The woman spoke in a manner that was deeply impressive, and the self-confessed outlaw fairly trembled beneath her look and arraignment of him.

But he was crime-hardened, and threw off the feeling readily, while he said in a sneering way:

"Cousin Helen, you are severe, too severe; for what else could I become, what other business could I embark in?"

"Piracy has made me rich, and it is my intention, after another good stroke that will bring me gold in plenty, to return to England, reclaim my fortune, settle down at Burke Dell, which I will have made into a perfect palace, and enjoy the remainder of my life, adding to my fortune and my enjoyment still more by taking as a wife the lovely daughter of some wealthy noble, for I am yet a young-looking man, though I have counted forty-five years, and withal not bad-looking, as you were wont to say in the long ago."

"Oh, Gordon! Gordon!" was all the poor woman could say.

"Well, now I think of it, cousin Helen, let me propose a plan to you.

"I always loved you, and, in spite of your fortune, wished to make you my wife; but you ran off with Leo Burton, and left me to mourn you.

"Now you are still a very handsome woman, and I am willing to compromise by making you my wife, returning to England with you, explaining the past as we deem best, and when I am gone, laid in my grave—which must come some day—your son can step into my shoes in the inheritance and title. What do you say, Helen?"

The woman shrunk from him in terror and horror combined, while she cried:

"I become your wife, Gordon Burke? I whom you tried to murder, along with my husband—I, whose inheritance you stole, and who know you so well in all your crimes?"

"My bitterest curses upon you, guilty man, for the words that you have dared to utter but now!"

"Begone! leave my presence and the shelter of my roof, and go back to your red robberies upon the high seas!"

"But dare to set foot upon English soil, and I swear to you, by the high heaven, where rules a just God, you shall suffer for the crimes you have committed.

"Now, go!"

The manner and words of the woman were awe-inspiring, and the guilty wretch seemed to feel keenly all that she said.

But the impression made was not for good, on the contrary for evil, for he said:

"You have spoken, Helen Burton, so now listen to me.

"I shall go to England, and your estate and your father's title shall be mine, and I shall revel in a palatial home, honored and courted, while your son wanders homeless and poor about the world."

"Never!" almost shrieked the woman.

"Oh, yes, it shall be as I say, and, as soon as I have accomplished the purpose that brought me here, I shall sail for England."

"And what fell purpose brought you here, Gordon Burke?"

"To rob a man of great wealth, whose home is in Portland.

"I had heard that he keeps his gold in his house, and I came here, as fishermen I brought to, told me that there dwelt here a youth known as Nick, the Light-house Boy, who knew these waters as he did his own face.

"I came here to get him to hide my vessel in some secluded basin among the islands, and then, by night, to pilot my boats to a quiet landing near the city, and guide me to the house of this rich doctor."

"Do you think that my son would be guilty of an act so base?"

"Oh, yes, for if he refused gold, steel would force him to obey."

"Never, I say!"

"And I say yes, Helen Burton."

"No, for I will take your vile life with my own hand first."

As she spoke she sprung to a bracket upon the wall and seized a pistol, which she leveled full at him.

He darted toward her, and struck up her hand with the back of his cutlass, just as she pulled the trigger.

The pistol exploded, and the bullet buried itself in the ceiling above his head.

With a cry of disappointment she snatched one of the pistols from his belt, but again he seized her hand, and, in the struggle that followed there came a sharp report, and the woman sunk down upon the floor, saying in a hoarse whisper:

"You have killed me, Gordon Burke, but mark well my dying words, that my son will avenge me."

With a bitter curse he bent over the woman; but she was dead, and crime-stained man that he was, he seemed to feel for the moment the full depth of his cruel crime.

CHAPTER V. THE INSULT.

OVER the wild waters, growing blacker and blacker, and seemingly more fearful each moment, under the approach of night, the little sloop bounded on her way to Portland.

At the helm stood Nick Burton, the Light-house Boy, as he was generally known to coasters and fishermen, and he held his vessel on its way unswervingly.

He had reefed down mainsail and jib before starting, and made all ship-shape, for the storm was in his teeth, and he knew that he would have to beat into the harbor.

After being out awhile the storm swept around, and began to curve off-shore, so that the daring young helmsman said:

"It will be easier, sir, to run in among the islands and thence up to the city, for the wind is off-shore now."

"But these island channels are most dangerous, young man."

"True, sir, but I know them well," and, as though confident of his own powers, and knowing what was best to be done, he put his helm down and sped landward.

It is, at this day, a wild and dangerous coast upon a stormy night; but then, long years ago in the late years of the century, it was far more forbidding than now, and channels now open among the islands, were then known to but very few persons.

Yet Nick did not waver in his purpose, and went flying toward the dark coast at a speed, which if he struck a sunken reef or rock, would shatter the little sloop to atoms.

"Be careful, boy," said Doctor Rowland earnestly, as the sloop darted by a huge rock, and within a few feet of it.

Nick paid no attention to the remark, and breathlessly Ruth and Vivian watched him as he held on his way.

The storm still raged with fury, and sweeping around, the seas began to be choppy and dangerous; but ere long the sloop darted into a narrow channel-way between two of the islands, and the pine-trees growing upon them almost overhung her decks.

"Boy, you are too reckless," sternly said Doctor Rowland, shivering at the danger about them.

"I know my way, sir, and there is no danger," was the response, and Nick devoted himself to the work before him, and proved his words by suddenly running the gantlet of the islands, and shooting out into open water.

In the distance the lights of the town were visible, and toward them the bow of the sloop now pointed.

"Boy, you have done well, and in spite of your years I never saw a better seaman, or one with more nerve," said the doctor, with unaffected admiration.

"It was best to run in this way, sir, for, now I may as well tell you that I caught sight of a large, armed schooner, which I have observed off-shore all day, and believe to be a pirate."

"Had they sighted us, they would have captured the sloop, or sunk her, so I took the chances of the island channels to escape her."

"You did well, my lad, and I'll not forget you for this night's work."

"I would rather that you would forget my services, Doctor Rowland, than remember them but to pay for them, as you seem to wish to insult me by attempting to do," was the somewhat hot response of the youth.

"You are too proud, boy, for your station in life."

"Had I no pride, sir, I would be an unworthy object, sir."

"I allow no one to place me under obligations to them, boy, though you did so once, in saving my child and refusing pay for it; but you shall not do so again, I am determined, if I have to force the gold upon your mother, who, like yourself, is far too proud for her station."

"You have served me well—you have saved my life, and that of my daughter and her friend, and I tell you I will not allow you to hold me so bound to you from a foolish fancy to be independent—so say no more about it."

"I shall only say, sir, that I am repaid in having done my duty, and if you offer me gold, I shall feel that you are determined to insult one who has served you, as you admit, simply because he is not your equal by birth and in fortune."

"Father, will you not let Mr. Burton have his own reward in feeling that he has done a deed which no gold can pay for?" asked Ruth.

"Yes, doctor, he is too brave a youth to offer a reward to, for gold cannot buy life," said Vivian Moreland.

Doctor Rowland made no reply, and sat in silence during the remainder of the run to the little dock off of his grounds.

Here Nick landed, and as he stood at the bow, aiding his fair passengers ashore, he raised his cap politely as Ruth stepped out on the dock, and said gallantly:

"Good-night, Miss Ruth, and feel that I have the greatest reward in knowing that I have saved you from death for the second time."

Ruth grasped the extended hand warmly, but, before she could reply, her father, who heard the earnest words, sprung forward and said angrily:

"Hal low-born scamp! do you dare address such words to my child?"

His hand was upraised as though to strike the youth; but Nick hastily cast off from the dock to avoid a scene, while he said:

"The respect I hold for your daughter, Doctor Rowland, prevents my resenting your insulting language."

"Good-night, young ladies!"

With this he sprung to his helm, as his sails caught the breeze and the sloop darted away, and soon after he was dashing along, over the dark, storm-swept waters on his return to the light-house.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETURN TO THE ISLAND HOME.

NICK BURTON was as proud as he was fearless.

He had been reared most carefully by his parents, who had urged him never to do an act that he would be ashamed of, and to maintain his self-respect under all circumstances.

Before taking the light-house as keeper, Mr. Burton had been a school-teacher in Portland, and Nick had received a very fair education, for he was very studious.

In vacation he was wont to cruise with fishermen, and soon became a very good sailor, and acquainted with the waters for leagues about Portland.

When Mr. Burton's health began to fail, he was appointed to the position of light-house-keeper, his post being at a point on the coast where in that early day a light was greatly needed.

He had saved up some money and purchased for Nick a small sloop yacht, in which the boy was wont to run up to the town for stores, and also to cruise among the islands for days at a time, until he became known as the best pilot in those waters.

Anxious to become a thorough seaman, and rise to the command of a vessel, his great ambition, Nick urged his parents to allow him to ship before the mast in a ship bound to South American waters.

On this cruise he was absent for long months, and returning in safety, after a rest at home, he again went on a voyage to China seas, from which he was recalled by the failing health of his father.

He returned as second mate of the vessel, and was very proud of his rapid advancement toward the quarter-deck.

But, after the death of his father, he felt that he must devote himself to the care of his mother, and so he became the keeper of the light-house, and his mother never heard a murmur from him, at his being tied down to one spot, just as he saw ahead the prospect of becoming the skipper of a vessel.

Amusing himself in his leisure hours, in hunting on the islands, and fishing among the channels, Nick became again thoroughly familiar with the waters, and the fishermen often called upon him to run their vessels into some snug haven, to ride out a storm, or to show them the best fishing-grounds, until he was soon known along the entire coast of Maine as Nick, the Light-house Boy.

While returning home that night in the storm, after having landed in safety Doctor Rowland and the two maidens, Nick's thoughts were busy, and of an aspiring nature.

He loved his mother devotedly, and yet, into his life was creeping another love which was far stronger, for it was almost a worship which he felt toward Ruth Rowland.

Going along the street one day, on his way to hunt birds in the green fields, he had come face to face with Ruth Rowland, then a little girl.

Her sweet face had touched him, and he at once doffed his cap in salute, which she acknowledged with a bow and smile.

He had gone but a few paces, after passing her, when he heard a sudden cry, and turning, saw a huge Newfoundland dog rushing directly upon her.

The dog was foaming at the mouth, and Nick knew that he was mad, and that a fearful death must follow for the little girl.

Instantly he threw his gun to his shoulder, took quick aim at the dog's eyes and fired.

He knew that his gun contained only bird-shot, and that it was the only chance to check the brute by blinding him, for he could not hope to kill him.

Like a statue, paralyzed with fear, Ruth had stood, a sure victim to the mad-dog, if the boy did not save her.

But the aim was sure, and the dog fell at the shot, howling in agony.

"Run! run out of his way!" shouted Nick, as he sprung toward the brute, his gun clubbed and raised, for the dog, though blinded, was yet most dangerous, should he come in contact with any one.

Watching his chance Nick ran in upon him,

bringing the butt of the gun down with terrible force upon the head of the mad-dog, just as he was rushing upon him in his blind fury.

Dead in his tracks dropped the dog, while a wild shout of joy went up from half a hundred people who had witnessed the daring act of the brave boy.

The gun was broken, and Nick's sport for the day was spoiled; but little he cared for that, as he had saved pretty Ruth.

Then followed the insulting offer of gold from Doctor Rowland, its indignant refusal, and the removal of the Burtons to the light-house, and afterward Nick's going to sea, but to always keep in remembrance the beautiful face of Ruth Rowland.

Again had he saved her life, and with her, her father and Vivian Moreland, and again had gold been tendered for his services, by the haughty doctor.

All these things went through Nick's mind, as he sped along on his way home, and his heart was full, to feel that he was debarred from loving Ruth openly, as he was poor, and only a Light-house Boy.

"Mother must be content to go back to our little cottage, up in the town, and live, while I leave home to make my way in the world."

"The island is not a pleasant place for her anyhow, and in town she has kindly neighbors who will look after her interests while I am away."

"If I go in the merchant service I cannot hope to win Ruth Rowland, for her father will still look down upon me; but in the navy I can work my way up to the quarter-deck, and, as an American officer I will be even his equal."

"Yes, I will ship in the navy, and upon the schooner-of-war now in port and fitting out to hunt pirates in the Gulf and West Indies."

"I will have a talk to-night with mother about it, and she will, I know, not keep me back."

So mused Nick as he sailed homeward over the dark, storm-swept waters, little dreaming what was then transpiring upon that little island upon which his light-house home stood.

The storm, as he had predicted, still held on, and was likely to keep up all night.

The sea was very rough, and alone, he had all he could do to manage his little sloop.

But he kept on for home, and at last saw the light from the tower gleaming out brightly over the waters.

Nearer and nearer he drew to the light-house, and watching it, he failed to see the schooner lying at anchor under the islands' lee, until he put his helm down to run into the basin.

In an instant he recognized the craft as the one he had seen during the day, and he knew not what to think of her anchoring there.

"It must be a vessel of-war after all, and she has anchored here to ride out the storm."

"Ah! here may be my chance for a berth, and if she is at anchor when the day breaks I will board her."

With this he luffed up sharp in the little island basin, dropped anchor, and after lowering sail, sprung into the little life skiff, he always carried on board the sloop, and paddled ashore.

A light burned brightly in the house, and opening the door he entered, expecting a greeting from his mother.

He knew that she always sat up for him, no matter how late it was, and he was surprised not to see her in her easy-chair as he entered.

Then, a tall form confronted him, stepping from behind the door, and he heard the ominous words:

"Young man, you are my prisoner."

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMPACT.

NICK BURTON started back at the stern words that greeted him, and threw himself upon the defensive.

But he was unarmed, and was fairly caught. He saw a pistol leveled full at him, and the same tall stranger who had had the death-struggle with poor Mrs. Burton now confronted him.

What could it all mean?

Where was his mother?

Why was he made prisoner?

These thoughts flashed like lightning through his mind, yet the questions found no answers.

Fearless, he did not quail at the stern words, but said coolly:

"Well, sir, what is your will with me?"

"That remains to be seen; but for the present I wish you to serve me, and it depends upon yourself what will be your fate," was the calm response.

"Well, what am I to do, sir?"

"You are Nick, the Light-house Boy?"

"Yes, men so call me."

"You are the best pilot in these waters?"

"I am so considered."

"You know how to reach the city by the inner waters?"

"With a small craft, yes."

"With boats?"

"Yes."

"Then you must pilot me there."
 "For what purpose?"
 "That is none of your business."
 "Who are you?"
 "Who do you think?"
 "A pirate," was the cool response.
 "You judge harshly of me, boy, but we will not quarrel if you do right by me."
 "First, be just to me, and tell me where my mother is?"
 "Your mother is safe."
 "And where is she?"
 "On board of my vessel."
 "Ha! A prisoner?"
 "Well, that depends."
 "Upon what?"
 "Upon you."
 "It depends upon me whether my mother is a prisoner or not?"
 "It does."
 "Then she will quickly be released."
 "She shall be, if you do your duty."
 "And I will, so tell me what I am to do?"
 "You are well acquainted in Portland?"
 "I am."
 "You can guide me there, you say?"
 "I could."
 "And will?"
 "That depends."
 "Upon what?"
 "Your purpose in going there."
 "That is my business."
 "It must be mine to know before I go."
 "Are you afraid for two men to enter the town?" asked the pirate, with a sneer.
 "Will but two of you go?"
 "Yes, one besides myself—excepting my four oarsmen, who will remain in the boat."
 "Well, I will pilot you there, if you release my mother."
 "That is not all you are to do."
 "Well?"
 "You know the house of Doctor Rufus Rowland?"
 "I do."
 "Is he in Portland now?"
 "He is."
 "Well, my business then is with him."
 "Do you mean him harm?"
 "By no means, for he is my friend."
 "The friend of a pirate?"
 "It is only your surmise that I am a pirate, my lad."
 "Then why sneak into the town by night as you wish to do?"
 "I have reasons for so doing which I cannot make known to you."
 "You command the schooner at anchor off the lee of this island?"
 "I do."
 "She has a most suspicious look."
 "She is a privateer."
 "Ah!"
 "And Doctor Rowland is part owner in her, and for that reason I wish to see him, while, for reasons I will not state, I do not care to have my presence known upon the coast, so wish to lie in hiding."
 "Why did you seize my mother, may I ask?"
 "For fear you would refuse to serve me, and if you did, I could force you to do so."
 "Had you stated the facts as you told me just now, I would have acted as your pilot."
 "I did not know that."
 "Now knowing it, you will return my mother at once to her home, for I feel that she must be terribly alarmed."
 "No, she understands just why she was made prisoner."
 "Return her to her home and I will serve you."
 "Serve me first, and she shall be placed again in her home."
 "No, you must let her come back first."
 "Boy, I can take no chances in this matter, so I will hold you to your bargain, through your mother, and there is no use of arguing the matter further."
 Nick saw that the man was in earnest, and for the sake of his mother he said:
 "When do you wish to go to the city?"
 "It cannot be done to-night."
 "No, for the storm is too severe for a boat to live, and it would be dawn before you arrived there."
 "Well, to-morrow night."
 "Yes."
 "You can pilot my schooner to a secure hiding-place among the islands?"
 "Yes."
 "And will start to-morrow night?"
 "Yes, after I have lighted the lamps."
 "So be it; now come on board my schooner with me, and act as my pilot."
 Nick could only obey, and the two left the little home together, and found a boat with four men in it, awaiting them on the shore of the little basin.
 Getting into it in silence, the oarsmen pulled for the schooner, and soon the youth and his captors entered the cabin together, and as he glanced at the deck upon boarding, and then at the interior of the craft, when its captain led him below, Nick muttered:
 "This craft is strangely like a pirate, from all I have heard of such vessels, captain."

"Appearances are often deceiving, my lad," was the smiling reply of the outlaw, as he bade the youth be seated while he withdrew to an inner state-room.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK AT THE SCHOONER'S HELM.

FOR some time did Nick sit alone in the cabin of the armed craft, for the captain did not reappear.

Where his mother was he did not know, but presumably she must be in one of the state-rooms, as her captor would not certainly put her forward among the men.

As the minutes went by Nick grew anxious, and so called in a low tone:

"Mother!"

No answer came.

In a louder voice he called again.

"Mother!"

Still no response.

"Mother, I am here, Nick, your son."

"Speak to me, if you hear my voice."

Still no answer.

In amazement he walked toward the companionway to go on deck.

There stood a seaman with a drawn cutlass, who said sternly:

"You cannot pass, sir."

"What! am I too a prisoner?" indignantly asked the youth.

"I do not know who or what you are, sir; but I guard this companionway, and you cannot pass without orders from the captain," was the reply.

Nick knew his utter helplessness, and returned to the cabin.

"What does this all mean?"

"He certainly holds my mother a prisoner on board, and yet not in the cabin—ha! here is the captain."

As he spoke the commander of the vessel entered by the companionway.

"Well, my lad, not having proper accommodations here for your mother, I returned her to her home, with two of my men to remain with her until you return."

"She will light the lamp to-morrow night, so there will be no mistake, and I will pick up my two men when I bring you back."

"I would have liked to have seen my mother, sir."

"That I could not permit; but do your duty by me and you will soon be restored to her."

"I am ready," was the reply of Nick, and the captain led the way on deck.

The men stood about in groups, evidently understanding that the schooner was to set sail, and in obedience to an order from their captain sprung to their posts of duty.

Nick quietly took his place at the helm, and glanced out over the dark waters.

The lamp in the little light-house burned brightly, and he saw the fire burning on the hearth through the open door.

The winds yet swept along fiercely, and the waves ran high.

Seaward all was darkness and storm, and landward the dark outlines of the islands were dimly visible, while the roar of the surf breaking upon them, and dashing upon the reefs was like thunder.

"Boy, yonder coast is a fearful one on a night like this!" said Captain Burke, approaching Nick, as the men were getting up the anchor.

"Yes, sir, it is a rough coast, I know."

"Had we not best lay here until daylight, so that you can see to run in?"

"I can see to-night, and if you wish to gain a hiding-place, it is better to start now."

"All right, if you have confidence in yourself."

"I have," was the calm remark, and a few moments after the anchors left the bottom, and under sails reefed down, the schooner sped away directly for the islands.

The crew held their breath, as the roar of the surf grew louder and louder, and watched the young helmsman most anxiously.

By his side stood Captain Burke, anxious, yet silent and watchful.

"Do you mean to find a break in yonder island, my lad?" he asked, as the dark outline of the forest-clad island loomed up threateningly dead ahead.

"Yes, sir."

"I should like to know where?"

"Do you see that break in the trees there, sir?"

"Yes."

"It does not seem to be a large one to-night, for it does not run straight through the island, there being a bend in it, but the trees yonder are fifty feet apart, and between the banks runs a channel deep, though narrow, and once through it, we are in a little island-dotted bay where there is a secure anchorage and hiding-place, for the trees will rise above your topmasts and prevent your being seen by passing vessels."

"Well, you have the helm, boy, and those who told me of you, said you could run the island channels the darkest nights."

"I can, sir," and just as the island ahead seemed to threaten destruction to the schooner,

an opening was discovered, into which the vessel shot straight as an arrow.

Upon either side the sea broke savagely upon the shores, which were so near that the spray of the rebound fell upon the schooner's deck.

Through the narrow channel the waters surged fiercely, and upon either side were the black walls of the forest.

Through the channel sped the schooner like a frightened race-horse, and, after skillfully rounding a bend, and jibing her sails to port with her change of course, she shot out into a broad sheet of water, which was protected by a score of surrounding islands.

Heading up the little island-dotted bay, Nick shortened sail gradually and soon gave the order to drop anchor under the lee of a huge rock island, the summit of which was covered with stunted pines.

"Here you are safe, sir, and if you will kindly give me a bunk, sir, I'll turn in, for I am very tired," said Nick.

"My lad, you are a wonderful pilot, and have a nerve of iron."

"Come, you are to have a berth in the cabin, so turn in when you please, for there is nothing for you to do until we start for the city," said the outlaw.

Nick bowed, and entering the cabin, was soon fast asleep, for the long strain upon him had utterly worn him out.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEPARTURE.

IT was afternoon when Nick awoke, so prostrated had he been in mind and body, by the long strain upon him.

He sprung out of his bunk, as soon as he saw that he was in strange quarters; but the knowledge of his situation flashed upon him in its full force, and he went on deck.

The crew were idly lolling about, some of them asleep, others fishing, and a few gambling.

The outlaw captain was pacing the deck, a cigar between his teeth, and a negro cook was dishing up dinner for the cabin.

"Well, my lad, how you ran into this rock-guarded hole in the darkness, is more than I can see," said the outlaw, upon discovering him.

"I know the way, sir."

"You most certainly proved that; but dinner is about ready, and, as you slept past your breakfast you will doubtless enjoy the meal."

"Yes, sir," and Nick cast his eyes about him.

The storm was over, and the sun shone brightly.

There was yet a brisk breeze blowing, though, and the white-caps were visible, whenever the wind got a clear sweep of the waters.

Nick then took a look at the schooner.

She had certainly a suspicious look, and appeared to be a craft that an honest vessel would give a wide berth to.

Her crew were an odd set, representing half a dozen nationalities, dressed in no particular garb, as far as order went, and looked more like a band of cut-throats than honest tars.

Over the stern, however, floated the American flag, placed there to avoid arousing his young pilot's suspicions, by Captain Burke.

"How do you like my craft, my lad?" asked Captain Burke, as he saw Nick taking her in with earnest glances.

"She looks stiff and fast, sir."

"She is both."

"And yet has the appearance of a pirate."

"She does look rakish and saucy, I admit."

"And your crew look like fighters."

"They are; but come to dinner, for I see Charcoal has all ready for us."

Nick was hungry, and the dinner was a tempting one, well served, so that the youth enjoyed it.

The outlaw saw his glances about the cabin, at the various things there, which further added to his suspicion of the craft, and said:

"I have relics here of a number of vessels we have captured, as you see."

"Yes, sir; but as an American privateer you do not capture other than English vessels, do you?"

"Oh, no, except by mistake; but why do you ask?"

"I see arms and other things here which are never seen on English vessels, only on French, Portuguese and Spaniards."

"Ah, yes, I got these from time to time; but let me fill your goblet with wine."

"No, sir, thank you, I do not drink wine."

Thus the afternoon dragged away and night came.

Then Captain Burke left Nick on deck, and sent for one of his officers to follow him into the cabin.

"Rogers, I leave in a short while in the gig, with four men, and that boy as pilot."

"You follow in the cutter with twenty men, fully armed, and I will carry a red light for you to keep us in sight by; but muffle your oars and do not crowd us, for the boy must not know that you are in our wake."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, captain," answered Rogers, who was a villainous-looking Englishman of two score years.

Soon after the gig left the schooner, and four men were along as crew, to act as oarsmen should the wind fail them.

A leg-of-mutton sail was set, and Nick took the tiller ropes, while Captain Burke reclined in the stern-sheets.

"Will not that lantern close up, sir?" asked Nick, observing the red lantern held in the hand of the outlaw captain.

"No."

"You do not need it."

"No, but if any one sees it they will think it a fishing-boat."

"Fishermen do not use red lights, sir."

"Well, it will do no harm," was the answer, and Nick said no more, but held on his way.

It was a run of nine leagues, but the wind was fresh, the course was readily laid, and the gig spun along at a lively rate, so that they came in sight of the city's lights in a few hours.

"Boy, you are a superb pilot," said Captain Burke, as Nick showed his skill in following the channels among the islands.

Nick made no reply, but bent his head and placed his hand to his ear.

"What is it?" uneasily asked Burke.

"I thought I heard the flutter of a sail astern, sir."

"Oh, no, I guess not."

"I cannot understand what boat would be in these waters at night, sir, but I certainly heard the flutter of a sail, as though a small craft was going about."

"Well, we will soon be at a landing and safe."

"It may be a guard-boat, sir, and if we are seen and brought to, you will have to give an account of yourself."

"I will, and can, though I would rather not have to do so."

"Where will you land?"

"Do you see that large light on the hillside, sir?"

"Yes."

"That is in the library of Doctor Rowland's mansion."

"Ah! then he has not yet retired, and my business with him will soon be settled."

"You must accompany me to the house, for your duties only end when you pilot my schooner out to sea again."

"I would rather not be seen at the house, sir."

"You will not be seen— Here we are, so lead the way; and men, be on your guard!" and Captain Burke sprung ashore with Nick on the grounds of Doctor Rowland, and the two walked up the sloping lawn toward the mansion, a hundred yards distant.

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE RECOGNITION.

ROWLAND MANOR was one of the handsomest houses in the pretty town of Portland, and was the admiration of the citizens of the place.

It had been built by a wealthy French exile, who had bestowed upon it his entire time, for he had nothing else to do, and spent a small fortune upon the mansion and grounds.

The latter consisted of half a dozen or more acres, bordering the drive upon the hill, and sloping down to the water's edge.

Summer-houses, fountains, statuary and pastures of flowers broke the landscape, with lawns as soft as velvet, and here and there majestic trees.

The house was built of stone, in the Italian villa style of architecture, and was large and handsomely furnished.

Hardly had the French exile completed his house when the ban against him in his own country was raised, and he gladly returned to *la belle France*, placing his beautiful estate in America in the market for sale.

But there were few men rich enough to pay down the sum demanded in cash for the place, and years passed by without a purchaser, and ruin seemed to have settled down upon the once lovely abode.

One day a stranger arrived in the city, and sought to purchase a house.

House after house was shown him, but were not good enough, and at last, in going to look at a grander mansion, he passed the exile's manor.

"Who owns that estate?" he asked of the real estate dealer.

He was told its history.

"And its price?" he inquired.

"He has held it at fifty thousand dollars, sir," was the answer.

"I will take it," quickly came the response, and that very day a small army of workmen were put upon the house and grounds, and two months after the purchaser, Doctor Rowland moved in with his daughter and servants.

In his grand library Doctor Rowland sat, the night after his narrow escape from death.

He seemed to be lost in deep meditation, and every now and then would spring to his feet and pace the floor.

Ruth and Vivian had gone out to a little entertainment for the evening, and he was awaiting their return.

Suddenly he heard steps and voices without

and sprung to his feet, for the words reached his ears:

"Seize the boy and hold him, lads, for he may give us the slip."

"There, now follow me into the house, and we'll see just what booty it contains for us!"

Then came the sound of heavy feet rushing upon the piazza, and next the door of the library was burst open and a dozen men rushed in.

Captain Burke the outlaw chief was at their head, and in their midst was Nick, held firmly by two seamen.

The rest of the crew, those that had been in the cutter following the gig, had come up suddenly at a signal from their captain, and Nick had discovered too late that treachery of some kind was intended to Doctor Rowland and his household, but he was powerless to prevent, and by the orders of the chief had been seized and held secure.

At the coming of the men Doctor Rowland had darted out into the hall, and called loudly to his servants, who had gone to their rooms to come to his aid.

At the same time, from a stand of arms in the hallway he had seized two pistols and a cutlass, and re-entered the library, followed by his valet and the butler who had heard his call and came to his aid in all haste.

Springing into the library he had shot one of the bold intruders dead, and cut another down before they were aware of his presence, almost.

Then the pirates fired and the butler fell dead, while the valet took to his heels and dashed out of the mansion to alarm the town.

At the same moment Captain Burke sprung forward, and his blade crossed the cutlass of Doctor Rowland.

Then came an exclamation from the lips of both men, and the weapons were lowered together.

"Burke, as I live!"

"Doctor, is it you?"

Such were the words the two uttered, and both seemed utterly amazed.

"Yes, Burke, and why is it that you attack my house?" sternly said Doctor Rowland.

"Before Heaven, doctor, I did not know that you were the owner of this place."

"Ho, lads, I have made a great mistake, but I'll pay you out of my coffers for it."

"Come, fall back, and to your boat, for you cannot touch *peso* or plate in this house."

The men fell back slowly and retreated to the piazza, when suddenly rushing feet were heard upon the lawn, shots rattled out lively, loud voices and commands, and darting out of the library he placed himself at the head of his men and a rapid retreat was made to the boats.

The valet, although flying in fear had done good service, for he had come upon the watch going the rounds at midnight, and hastily led them to the rescue.

Though Captain Burke would have retreated, and left the house untouched, as his words implied, without the coming of the watch, he at once saw the necessity of retreating rapidly and in order, and in a compact mass his men double-quickened to their boats, having poured a volley upon their foes which summarily checked them.

"To your boats, lads, and we'll be all right—ha! where is the lad?" cried the outlaw leader.

"He was captured, sir, when one of the lads holding him, was shot down," answered a seaman.

"Too bad! now we have to depend upon ourselves alone," and he muttered in a low tone:

"With the schooner at anchor where she is, and leagues away from us, the chances are against us."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE TOILS.

"Ha! you then are a pirate, and led these outlaws to sack my house?"

The remark was made by Doctor Rowland, as Nick was brought into the library by two of the watch, who had come to the rescue at the call of the valet.

The scene was a thrilling one, for the furniture of the library was overturned, the butler lay dead across the threshold of the hall door, a dead pirate was in the center of the room, and one badly wounded was leaning against the wall and groaning in deep anguish.

The doctor stood pale and stern, gazing upon Nick, who was securely held by two of the watch, his face fierce with indignation.

Without lay another dead buccaneer, and several wounded watchmen, and the bells of the city were ringing a wild alarm.

"You know that I am no pirate, Doctor Rowland," was Nick's indignant reply to the doctor's insulting charge against him.

"Actions speak louder than words, boy, for you were with the pirates and certainly led them here; but I confess I would not have believed it of you, had I not seen your guilt myself."

"It is false, for I did not know that those men were buccaneers."

"Their leader told me he wished to see you, and that he was a privateersman."

"He came to the light-house and asked me to be his pilot, threatening harm to my mother

if I refused, and I consented under protest, if he would come alone."

"He said that he would, but treacherously had a boatload of his men follow, and I was seized and dragged into this affair with him."

"That is the truth of the matter."

"You tell a plausible story, my lad, but no one will believe you, and I am sorry that I cannot, for I owe much to you for the services you have rendered me and mine."

"Officer, what is your opinion?" and Doctor Rowland turned to the constable of the night watch.

"I've known the boy a long time, sir, and always thought well of him; but I certainly captured him among the pirates, and he was not bound when I put hand on him, so I'll have to jail him."

"No, no, do not send me to jail, for I am innocent of having done wrong, and it will kill my poor mother to have me go to prison, accused of being a pirate," pleaded Nick.

"You should have thought of the consequences, boy, before you sinned," sternly said the doctor.

"I will pilot the brig-of-war in the harbor to where the schooner is anchored, sir, and prove by the pirates, when they are captured, that I am guiltless," urged Nick.

"Here is one of their number who is not dead."

"Let him speak," said Doctor Rowland, and he turned to the wounded pirate lying against the wall.

The man had an evil face and looked vicious.

He knew that he had either to die of his wound or be hanged, and he felt savage at having been left to suffer by his comrades.

As they were not present to vent his spite upon, he determined to punish the one in his power.

He knew nothing of the terms between Nick and his captain; but the conversation just heard by him proved that the youth was in a tight place, and he sided against him.

"I'll talk if yer don't hang me," he said sullenly.

Doctor Rowland stepped over to the man and glanced at the wound he had received.

A short examination showed him that the man could not live, so he gave the constable a significant look, and said:

"Well, my man, I pledge myself that you shall not be hanged, if you tell the truth."

"Then I'll talk."

"Well, what have you to say about this boy?"

"He came out to the schooner, where we was anchored, riding out the gale, and offered to run us into a safe anchorage for so much gold."

"The cap'n agreed, and then the boy told him of a place in this town, belonging to a rich doctor, what he could guide him to, to rob, and would do it if he was paid well."

"The cap'n agreed, and here we is, so you can guess whether the lad know'd what he were about or not."

"Villain! in your false face I fling the lie," cried Nick, starting toward the wounded pirate.

"Hold, boy! would you harm a dying man, for that wretch has but a few hours to live?"

Nick shrunk back, while the pirate, hearing the words of the doctor, began to blaspheme in a fearful manner at his fate, to suddenly check his fury as into the room, arrayed in their evening toilet, and looking most beautiful, though very pale, came Ruth and Vivian.

"Oh father! what does this mean?" cried Ruth anxiously.

"It means, my child, that my home has been attacked by pirates, and that the brave boy who placed us under such deep obligations to him, has canceled all debts between us, for he has led the outlaws to rob our home."

"Never! Nick Burton was never guilty of so base a crime."

"Speak out, sir, and tell my father that you are guiltless!"

"I have told them the truth, but they do not believe me, Miss Ruth," answered Nick, in a low but firm tone.

"I believe you to be innocent, and you will be proven so," was the spirited reply of the maiden, and she would have said more, but her father sternly called out:

"Ruth, go to your room at once, and constable, take that young pirate to jail!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BRIG-OF-WAR BREEZE.

CONSTABLE CRAIG was a kind-hearted man, though he had a stern sense of duty, and would rather be severe than lenient, where his conscience told him he was right.

Nick Burton had always been a little hero in his eyes.

He had seen the boy go out in his skiff one night, and rescue a crew whose raft had struck on the rocks.

He had known him to leave town alone in his little sloop, in the teeth of a snorting gale, to return home, for fear his mother might be anxious about him.

He was well aware of his saving Ruth from the mad-dog, years before, and the town was singing his praises, for his gallant rescue of

Doctor Rowland, Ruth and Vivian, when lo! he turns up as pilot for a band of buccaneers to pillage the home of the very man whose life he had saved twenty-four hours before.

It was with a sad heart then, that Constable Craig put irons on the youth's wrists, to carry him to the town jail, leaving his men to look after the dead, and the wounded pirate.

As he walked along the street toward the jail, both the constable and Nick saw that the town was fully aroused, for people were hurrying to and fro, and the bells of the churches still sent forth their warning of danger.

To party after party the constable told the story, and a large mob was at his heels as he hurried Nick on to prison, and he feared a rescue, as many shouted out that the boy was innocent.

Once within the walls of the lock-up, the constable said:

"Nick, you made a proposition to the doctor, which he did not seem to hear."

"Well, sir?"

"You said you would pilot the brig-of-war to the anchorage of the schooner, and let the pirate captain say whether you were guilty."

"I will, sir, gladly, for the brig can capture the schooner, as she carries half a dozen more guns, and nearly double the number of men."

"We can try it, so come with me."

Out of the jail they hastened, by a private entrance, and thus avoided the crowd, while they took the street leading to the shore.

A boat was at hand, and springing into it, Constable Craig seized the oars and pulled rapidly out to a trim-looking brig-of-war that lay out in the harbor.

All were awake on board, for the alarm had been heard, and a boat-load of men had been sent ashore to see if their services were needed.

The boat was hailed, and the constable replying, was ordered alongside.

An officer met the constable and Nick at the gangway, and conducted them at once to the cabin, where the young commander, Donald Dean was seated in full-dress uniform, having but a short time before returned from the entertainment in the city, which Ruth and Vivian had been attending at the time of the pirates' attack upon Rowland Manor.

Donald Dean was a handsome young sailor, who had won his way up rapidly from a middy to the command of the American brig-of-war Breeze, as fleet a craft and well-officered and manned as any vessel in the navy.

He received his visitors with courtesy, recognizing both of them, for he had met the constable several times before, and Nick had one night, when he had arrived off the harbor crippled in a gale, boldly run him into an anchorage.

But he started, as his eyes fell upon the handcuffs upon the youth, and said quickly:

"What does this mean?"

"I am accused of piracy, sir," sadly said Nick.

"No, no, it cannot be; but pray explain."

The constable did so, and then made known the proposition of Nick to pilot the brig to attack the pirate.

"I'll accept your services at once, Nick, for I feel, if we capture the schooner you can prove your entire innocence of the cruel charge against you."

"Ho on deck!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and a young officer darted down the companionway at the call of his commander.

"Mr. Bainbridge, have the brig gotten under way with all haste, and fire a signal gun for the boat's crew ashore to return at once, for we will need all our men, if, as I am told, the pirate is the rover of the West Indies known as Burke the Buccaneer."

"The officer hastily departed to obey the orders, while Captain Dean said:

"Now, Nick, will you give me your word of honor not to attempt to escape, if I free you of those irons while you are on the brig?"

"I will, sir."

"Remember, I make myself responsible for you."

"I shall keep my word, Captain Dean."

"And constable, you will go with us?"

"With pleasure, captain."

"Then I will ask you to unlock Nick's irons, while I get off my pea-fowl attire and get into a fighting rig," and the young captain retired to his state-room, just as a heavy gun pealed forth, as a signal for the boat's crew ashore to return to the brig.

In a short while the boat was seen approaching with all speed, and, just as it touched the side, the brig began to glide through the waters, and, with Nick at the helm went flying seaward under pressure of a ten-knot breeze.

CHAPTER XII.

A CAPTURE.

WITH the removing of the dead from the Rowland Manor, the crowd departed, the wounded pirate dying as they attempted to move him, with his charge against Nick Burton to remain as he had made it.

Doctor Rowland took matters, outwardly, with the coolest kind of indifference, but within

his heart and brain a fever was raging, for he had seen one that night whom he had hoped never to see again, and then Ruth had shown a sudden manner toward the Light-house Boy, which could be interpreted only as having love for its foundation.

The doctor had disliked the notoriety the affair had given to him and his home, and he knew that there was trouble ahead, as Nick Burton was to be tried for piracy.

He would of course have to appear against one who had saved his life, and twice saved his daughter from a sad end, and once been the rescuer of her friend, Vivian Moreland.

It would seemingly be a bitter thing for him to do, to swear away the life of Nick Burton; but then, better that the youth should hang as a pirate, than win the love of his beautiful daughter Ruth, and perhaps steal her from him, he thought.

Thus the matter was conned over and over in his mind, as he passed to and fro in his library, after the departure of the crowd.

The room had not been set to rights, for here and there the furniture was overturned, a costly piece of statuary lay shattered upon the floor, a mirror had been shattered by a bullet, a curtain torn down, and blood-stains were upon the carpet.

But Doctor Rowland minded not the disorder as he walked to and fro, his hands clasped behind his back.

Suddenly the sound of voices and hurrying feet was heard, and five men appeared in the doorway.

"Pardon, doctor, but seeing the door open, and knowing you were up, we made bold to stop and see if you would let your servants stand guard over this prisoner, while we return and chase another boat, sir?"

The speaker was a sailor-like looking man, whom the doctor recognized as the chief of the harbor police boats, and with him were three of his men, and a prisoner, the latter heavily ironed.

One glance at the prisoner, and Doctor Rowland recognized Captain Burke, the Buccaneer, and he started as he did so.

But he showed no sign of recognition now, and said sternly:

"Captain Wilder, that is the man that robbed my house to-night, and I certainly will guard him for you with a great deal of pleasure."

"I knew that you would, doctor, as we have no time to run him down to jail, and no men to spare."

"We had just pulled over from the Cape, when a shore boat told us that pirates had landed and robbed some houses, and we gave chase and captured this fellow, killing the four men in the boat with him."

"But there was another boat-load, we learn, as we landed, and so I came here with the prisoner, and will leave him in your charge, while we pursue his crew, for this is the captain, as he himself admits."

"Leave him with me, Wilder, and I will be responsible for his safe keeping," said the doctor, and Wilder and his men hurried back to their boat, to give chase to the cutter, while Doctor Rowland turned to the prisoner, and said:

"Burke, this is a bad situation you have gotten yourself into."

"Not so bad, doctor, as it might have been," was the cool response.

"What do you mean?"

"You will set me free."

"You think so?" said Doctor Rowland with a sneer.

"I know so."

"Don't be too certain."

"It will be to your advantage to do so."

"I do not see how."

"I have a memory, doctor, and a good one, and, should I be brought to trial here, I might tell something that you would rather have remain unsaid."

"Curse you!" Doctor Rowland gritted through his shut teeth.

"Don't you agree with me, doctor?" asked Burke with a smile.

"How did you come to get captured?"

"I ordered my lieutenant to return the way we came, while I went outside, and thus through the channel in among the islands, hoping to find a better way out for the schooner, which he was to get under way and push to sea in, picking me up somewhere in the channel."

"But I ran upon that guard-boat and got caught, after they had shot my men."

"I am caught, as you see, but as he has left you my keeper, I can go my way."

"You presume upon the past, Burke."

"Not more than I have a right to; but come, time is precious to me, so get me off at once."

"I dare not let you go."

"You dare not let me remain, doctor."

"How can I?"

"Have you a servant you wish to get rid of?"

"How?"

"One who will take gold?"

"Yes."

"Call him, put me in his charge, and I will buy him."

"Well?"

"Be quick about it, doctor, and call your man, as soon as you have unlocked my irons, for here are the keys which I slipped from that man's belt."

"Let my servant do that too; but remember, you are never to come here again?"

"I agree, and in fact, did not know that the rich doctor I came to rob, was the one I had known in the long ago, or I should not have come."

"One word?"

"Yes."

"That boy who brought you here?"

"What of him?"

"Is he guilty?"

"Of what?"

"Being your ally."

"No, he is innocent; but anyhow, as he is a prisoner, let him swing for it, as it will be better for me if you do, though he's a gallant boy, and it's a hard fate for him."

"Still he is in my way, so set him down as guilty, have him tried and hanged."

"Well, I will call my servant," and the doctor pulled the bell-cord.

The valet appeared, still wearing a look of alarm.

"Henrique?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Docteur."

"This is the pirate chief who robbed me, and he was captured by Captain Wilder and left for me to guard, so I place him in your keeping, and you lead him to a vacant room in the north wing and stand guard over him."

"Here is a pistol and cutlass for you."

"Oh, monsieur!" groaned Henrique.

"Do as I order you, sir!" the doctor sternly said.

"Yes, monsieur," and the valet seized the weapons and marched the pirate out of the room, but with no very evident relish of the duty he had been assigned to.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE.

THE room to which Henrique led the pirate was a comfortably furnished one on the same floor with the library, and with a window opening out upon the lawn.

Henrique was a natural-born villain, and one who was a coward by nature, yet who would do a red act if he did not endanger his own life thereby.

He had made the doctor an excellent servant, was a Frenchman of rather *distingue* appearance, and had evidently been educated and seen better days.

He stood the pirate over in one corner, drew a table between them, and sat down with his weapons on the table, to watch him.

The lamp stood on the table, and lighted up the face of each man.

Without losing time, the buccaneer said:

"Henrique, are you rich?"

"Would I be in *zis pozeeshun*, monsieur, eef I vas reech?"

"Hardly; but you love money?"

"I vas no fool, monsieur."

"About what does the doctor pay you a month?"

"Twenty dollars."

"Twenty dollars!"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, I will give you one hundred dollars a month, for twelve months, payable in advance, if you will serve me."

The Frenchman's eyes opened wide, and he arose quickly to his feet.

"Does monsieur mean it?"

"Here is your pay."

The pirate placed the money on the table before him, counting it out of a bag he drew out of his breast pocket.

At the same time he took up the pistol, and said:

"Henrique, I could kill you, and thus make my escape, if so I wished; but I prefer to pay you the money and have you accompany me, for you shall have far more than what I promised."

"Come, unlock these irons, open that window, and let us get off at once."

"Ah, monsieur, I was afraid."

"Then I will kill you, and go alone."

"Ah no, monsieur, I will go wif you."

"Do as I say then."

With trembling hands the Frenchman unlocked the irons, and then softly raised the window.

It made a slight noise, and he paused, while he said:

"Ah, monsieur, if ze docteur vas to hear us, he would kill ze both of us."

"Hurry up then!" was the stern order, and a moment after the two men stood out on the lawn.

"What boats has your master?"

"Von little sloop, monsieur."

"We will take that; come on!" and the pirate led the way down to the shore, where a pretty sloop yacht lay at anchor.

"Monsieur, I haves some moneys in my rooms, that I vas like to get," said Henrique.

"How much is there?"

"Tree hundred tollars, monsieur."

"I will give you as much to make up for its loss."

"Into the boat, Henrique."

With a sigh the Frenchman got into a row boat, the pirate followed, and they were soon on board the yacht.

Fastening the skiff astern, in case he should need it, Captain Burke quickly set sail, the creaking of the blocks causing the Frenchman to shiver with dread, for he expected to see his master appear upon the scene at any moment.

The wind was fresh, the tide with them, and the yacht fleet, so that, with the buccaneer at the helm they sped down the harbor and out to sea.

As they gained an offing they sighted a vessel standing up the coast.

"It is a brig, and an armed vessel," said Burke, gazing at her through a glass, which Henrique handed him from the locker.

"She keeps close in, monsieur."

"Yes, and has doubtless left the harbor to head me off—yes, she runs in toward the inlet this side of the light-house, and will capture my schooner, sure," and the buccaneer seemed for a moment disheartened.

But he held on his way, ran past the light-house—deserted, and yet sending forth its warning beacon over the waters—and arrived off the inlet, or island channel, just as day dawned.

What to do he hardly knew, for the brig-of-war had surely gone into the inner bay to look up the schooner.

Still he heard no firing, and it certainly was time the two vessels should have met.

Surely his lieutenant could not have surrendered without a shot.

What could it mean?

That question he could not answer, and as daylight was now brightening up sea and land, he felt that he must seek a place of safety for himself.

Unacquainted with the coast as he was, with no provisions on board his little craft, the Frenchman but an indifferent sailor, vessels evidently on the search for him, and his own schooner, as he believed, captured, he was certainly in a most desperate situation.

Heading for the point of a heavily-wooded island, determined to seek a hiding-place until night, he suddenly saw the bowsprit of a vessel shoot out from behind it, and then from his lips broke a glad cry, as his schooner appeared dashing seaward under clouds of canvas.

Loudly he hailed, and, being seen and recognized, the vessel changed her course and stood down toward him.

Soon he was picked up, and his lieutenant said:

"Captain, we were in a tight place, but I met this young girl last night on our run back to the schooner, and she consented to pilot us out to sea by another channel than the one we came in by; and lucky for us that she did, for we saw a brig-of-war searching for us though she did not see us, not expecting evidently that we had left our anchorage."

As Kemper, the pirate officer, spoke, he turned to a young girl who stood near.

She was a beauty in face and form, but a wild, savage kind of beauty it was, for she was barefooted, her neck was encircled by strings of pretty sea-shells, and her hair hung in heavy masses down to her knees.

Her complexion was as brown as a hazel-nut, and she was dressed in a fancy red skirt and blue waist.

"Who are you, my girl?" asked Captain Burke, struck with the appearance of the strange girl.

"I am Island Nell, the Fisher Girl, and I am ashamed of myself for having been deceived into saving a pirate craft, as I now know this vessel to be, but which I promised to pilot out to sea, believing you to be honest seamen!" was the almost fierce reply.

"You shall be well paid, my girl."

"I scorn your gold, and only wish to leave this accursed vessel."

"But you will let me reward you, surely?"

"No, for your gold is blood-stained and would bring but ill-fortune to me and mine," and she strode toward the gangway, where her light skiff lay upon the deck.

"Here, my girl, if you are a sailor, you can take the sloop and return it to Doctor Rowland, for I took it from him last night."

"Tell him I bribed the guard he placed over me last night to let me escape and go with me."

"Men, put her skiff into the sea for her, and make it fast to the stern of the yacht."

The girl did not reply to him, but went over the side into the yacht and took the helm, while the men cast it off free of the schooner.

"Good-by, my sweet girl, and a pirate's prayers attend you," called out the buccaneer.

"And the curse of Island Nell attend you," came back the fierce answer as the yacht sped shoreward, with the two little boats in tow.

CHAPTER XIV.

ISLAND NELL, THE FISHER GIRL.

UPON one of the larger and more fertile islands, in the vicinity of Portland, dwelt at the

time of which I write, an old fisherman and his grandchild, a young girl who had won the name of Island Nell, the Fisher Girl.

He had come to the island when Nell was little more than a baby, built a comfortable log-house, purchased a stanch fishing-smack and the necessary boats, and entered upon the life of a fisherman.

It was true that he did not drive a very prosperous business at the work, but yet he always had ample money to pay for his groceries, and lived better by far than those of his class about him, and whom he seemed to scorn.

He was fully three-score years when he first appeared in the vicinity, and yet seemed hale and strong.

Upon the little island, and deck of the fishing-smack, Nell grew to girlhood, and she became noted as a skillful and daring sailor, while, as her grandfather, for so she called him, grew in years, she was wont to do most of the work, carrying cargoes of fish alone to the city and selling them at a good profit.

What the name of the old man was, no one seemed to know, but he was called Old Neptune by the seamen about, and his grandchild became known as Island Nell, the Fisher Girl.

Next to Light-house Nick, who was some leagues away from the home of this strange pair, Island Nell was said to be the best pilot in those waters, and it was while running back home in her light skiff, from a visit to the town to buy stores, that she had come upon Kemper, the pirate lieutenant, and been persuaded by him to run the schooner out to sea, he telling her that it was an American war vessel.

Discovering her mistake, after she got on board, she had refused to act as pilot, but Kemper had told her he would put his boat out ahead and tow out, and keep her on board, and, remembering her grandfather, almost helpless in his old age, she had taken the helm and was in good water, when the brig-of-war was sighted running in far up the coast.

Had she expected pursuit, she would not have touched the helm, and was now fairly enraged at having saved a pirate from capture.

Upon leaving the schooner, she had headed directly for the nearest channel through the islands, where she could head off the brig-of-war, and send her in chase of the pirate.

Rapidly she flew away from the hateful presence of the pirate schooner, and, fully acquainted with the locality where she would find the brig, she started for the channel leading through the islands.

As she entered it, she saw that the buccaneer schooner had put about and was standing directly for the light-house.

This she did not understand.

Gazing at the light-house, she was surprised to see that the lamp still burned in the tower.

Again she was at a loss to understand this strange circumstance, for both Mrs. Burton and Nick were too attentive to their work to allow such a thing to happen with their consent.

"I will return to the light house, as soon as I have warned the brig, which certainly has a pilot on board, or it could not have run through that channel, and so will not need me," she said, as she headed for the channel through the islands.

In a short while she came out into the bay, and her eyes fell upon the brig, cruising slowly along, and evidently engaged in searching the islands which might give shelter to the schooner.

She was discovered from the brig almost at the moment she sighted it, and the Breeze at once stood down to meet her.

In half an hour more Nell luffed up and ran alongside, and, with the agility of a boy sprung upon the deck.

"Well, Wild Nell, my pretty fisher girl, what are you doing cruising in Doctor Rowland's yacht?" said Captain Dean, pleasantly, advancing to meet her.

In her quick, terse way Nell told her story, just as it occurred, and at once the brig was a scene of seeming excitement, as sail was set to start in chase of the schooner.

Nell bowed to Nick, who stood at the wheel, and her face colored, for the young girl was more than half in love with the handsome youth who on one occasion had saved her father from death, when their smack had sprung a leak and was sinking beneath them.

The youth had always admired the dashing girl, though the two had never very often held conversation together, although they had often met on the sea, and sailed by with a pleasant nod or word.

"I know the brig had a pilot, to run through that channel, Nick, but I didn't think of its being you, and that accounts for the lamp in the light-house being still burning."

"Is it still burning, Nell?" asked Nick, anxiously.

"Yes, I noticed it as I came in, and the schooner was standing down toward the light-house."

"I do not know what it can mean, for my mother is still there, although she has two guards with her."

"Two guards with her?" asked Nell, in surprise.

"Yes, and I am a prisoner, Nell."

"You a prisoner, Nick?" and the beautiful eyes opened wide.

"Yes," and Nick told his story in a few words.

"It's a lie, and they who accuse you know it to be," was the savage response of the girl.

Then she added:

"Well, all is ready now for the brig to go in chase, for here comes the shore-boat; and I must be off; but I will go at once to the light-house, Nick, and your mother won't be a prisoner long, I promise you, and I'll take grandpa over and 'tend the light, while she goes up to the city to see what they will do with you."

With this she went over the side into the yacht, while Nick called out:

"Break the news gently, Nell, to my poor mother."

"I will, good-by," and the brig, having called in its searching boats, stood seaward under all sail, Nick still acting as pilot, while Nell followed in her wake, bound for the light-house.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FATAL LETTER.

"CAPTAIN, as I have duties in town I dare not neglect, and you won't need Nick any more, after he runs the channels out to sea for you, suppose you let us land at the light-house, while you go on after the schooner."

So said Constable Craig, as the Breeze was dashing swiftly through the island channel out to sea, Nick skillfully guiding her course and winning the admiration of both officers and crew.

"All right, constable; but take no steps against Nick until my return, for I am confident that the pirates' testimony will clear the boy, or his face belies him greatly."

"So say I, sir; but duty is duty, and I've got to hold him until he's proven innocent."

"Yes, and as I will not need Nick, after getting outside I will give you a boat to make the light-house in, for I do not wish to take the time to land you."

"See! there comes the light-house in view, and we— Ha! there goes the schooner, and she has but a league the start of us."

"Ho, lads! clear away the gig there, and let the constable and the lad get into it."

"Lively all of you!"

A cheer broke from the crew at the words of their captain, and also at catching sight of the schooner, and springing into the gig, the constable and Nick were hastily lowered into the sea and the painter cast loose.

Away then bowled the Breeze in chase of the schooner, leaving the gig dancing in her wake, as Nick quietly took the oars.

The schooner was under a press of canvas, and was flying swiftly along, evidently feeling that he had a swift pursuer astern of her, and the constable and Nick eagerly watched the chase, as the latter rowed with a strong stroke toward the island on which stood the light-house.

"The brig gains, sir," said Nick after awhile.

"You are right, lad, and I hope will overhaul the blasted pirate afore dark; but here we are at the light-house, almost."

"Yes, and I do not see my mother."

"I do hope no harm has befallen her," said Nick anxiously.

"The pirates would not dare to harm her; but we shall soon know."

"Now, lad, hold out your hands, for though the captain let you go free, I dare not do it," and the constable held out the irons.

"Oh, sir, don't let my mother see me in irons," pleaded Nick.

"Duty is duty, lad, and I must carry out the law and protect myself."

"You are accused of being a pirate, and I must keep you safe, for your mother might force you to escape from me, for a woman will fight for her children."

"Come, out with your hands."

Nick turned pale, but held out his hands, while he said:

"I submit, constable, because I am innocent of the charge against me."

"Were I guilty, I could have killed you and escaped long ago, for see here!" and he held up a pistol he drew from his breast.

"You had me dead, lad, if you had wanted to kill me, that is certain."

"Now let me go up to the house and break the news, as it is, to the old lady."

As he spoke the constable sprung on shore, and leaving Nick in the boat alone walked up to the light-house.

The light still burned in the tower, and no one answered his knock, so he pushed open the door and entered.

No one was within, and searching the house he found it deserted.

Upon the table in the little sitting-room he espied a letter, and taking it up saw that it was addressed to "Nicholas Burton."

"Duty is duty, and it is my duty to read this epistle, which may shed light upon things, though I do hate to meddle," he muttered, as he took up the letter.

It was not sealed, and was written in a feminine hand.

It read as follows:

"MY DARLING SON:—I have decided that it is best that I should carry out the plans of which we were speaking last night, after we made the discovery that Burke the Buccaneer is our kinsman, and so I sail with him to-day in his schooner, leaving you to follow as soon as you can do so."

"You know where to find me, and with the gold which our kinsman gives us, in return for your valuable services to him last night, although his plans were thwarted by circumstances, we can dwell in affluence, and no longer live in poverty as in the past."

"As soon as you have matured the plans you have in mind, come to me without delay."

"Your ever devoted"

"MOTHER."

Thrice the constable read this communication though without comment, and then he gave a long, low whistle, while he said:

"That settles it, and the boy is really as bad as a pirate, if not one."

"He'll hang sure, and I've no longer compassion for him."

"And his mother! Who'd have thought that woman would be content to live on pirates' gold?"

"But so it is with the world, and she's no different and has gone on the schooner."

"Well! well! now to get back to town with that sinful youth as soon as possible, and put him behind iron bars, when I can breathe more freely."

With this the constable placed the letter in an inner pocket, took another close survey of the little house, and walked down to the shore to join Nick.

To his surprise he saw a sail in the basin.

"It is that Island Nell, for I recognize the doctor's yacht," he muttered.

As he reached the shore he saw that Nell had landed and was earnestly talking with Nick, and apparently urging him to some course, for the youth said:

"No, no, Nell, that won't do."

"Ho, constable, what did you put irons on Nick for?" angrily said the girl, as the officer walked up.

"Because it was my duty," was the bluff response.

"Well, I shall take them off."

"Quick, hand me your keys, or I'll kill you."

Constable Craig was not a man who had been often taken at a disadvantage, but he was compelled to admit to himself that just then he was caught, for Nell covered him with her pistol, and there was that in her look that showed that she was in deadly earnest.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRANGE RETURN.

THE unexpected and determined stand taken by Nell the Fisher Girl, was as great a surprise to Nick, as it was to the constable, and for a moment the youth was equally as taken aback as was the man.

But he collected himself first, and said quickly:

"Come, Nell, lower your pistol, for Constable Craig is only doing his duty, and you must not go against the law."

"Well said, lad, for it is a bad thing for man or woman to raise their hand against the law, and I hope Nell will think better of it," said the constable in a kindly tone.

"I wish you to understand, Constable Craig, that I do not act for effect but mean just what I say; so hand me your keys or I will kill you, for Nick is no more guilty than I am."

The constable was armed, but he would not draw a weapon on a woman.

Then, too, he knew the reputation that Nell had as a dead shot, for she was wont to hunt on the islands and mainland, and bring squirrels down with her rifle.

He was, therefore, in a quandary as to what to do, and stood pondering, while it was very evident that Island Nell was becoming impatient.

There she stood on the shore, her pistol leveled at the head of the constable, while Nick stood by her side, the handcuffs upon his wrists.

"Give me the keys, constable, that unlock these irons, or take the consequences!" cried Island Nell, in a voice that rung with threatening determination.

"I'll not do it, Nell; so do your worst, if you have the mind, for I'm not the man to raise a hand against a woman."

"Then take the consequences, for Nick shall not hang like a dog!" said the angry girl, and she pulled the trigger.

The report followed, and Constable Craig would have dropped dead at her feet but for the quick and timely act of Nick, the Light-house Boy, who struck up the weapon as it exploded, and thereby sent the bullet whizzing above the head of its intended victim.

"Nell! Nell! are you mad to do such a thing?" cried Nick, sternly.

"It was to save you, Nick, from dying on the gallows," faltered the girl, and turning away she burst into tears, while Constable Craig said, in a tone that was not unkind:

"Don't be too quick, my girl, with deadly weapons, or you may bring yourself a life of misery."

"And as for you, lad, you saved my life, and

I appreciate it; but duty is duty with me, and I must take you up to the town."

"I am ready to go, but you have not told me of my mother."

"She is not here."

"Where then is she?" anxiously asked Nick.

"Gone; perhaps you know where?"

"No, unless that pirate did not return her home as he said he would."

"Well, you know best, my boy; but we'll not discuss that, as we must be off, and I'll ask Nell here to take care of the light until some one else is appointed, or if she wishes the berth of keeper I can get it for her, and she can move the old man over whenever she wishes to. It's better work, my girl, than fishing."

"Do you mean that Nick is not to remain here?" she asked, turning her tear-stained face upon the constable.

"Yes, for he will be on trial for his life."

"Take the place, Nell," said Nick.

"I will, for the present, Nick; at least until you or your mother return, and I will go after grandpa now, if you will show me about the lamps."

This Nick did in a few moments, and taking Doctor Rowland's yacht, the constable and his prisoner set out for Portland, while Nell, in her own light skiff went after her grandfather.

The constable sat silent most of the way, for his brain was busy in thought.

The letter he had found in the sitting-room of the light-house worried him.

It was a confession of Nick's guilt, from a source which he could not doubt.

Then he felt that he owed his life to the youth, who had saved him from Island Nell's bullet.

He liked the boy, and he felt grateful to him, and hated to have him die on the gallows; but his duty he must do, and he sunk all feeling in the matter and decided to do that duty, bitter as it was.

The little yacht's approach was watched from the piazza of the Rowland Manor, where sat the doctor, his daughter and Vivian Moreland.

They leveled their glasses at it, and recognized Nick at the helm.

The irons had been removed by the constable, who was no sailor, that he might manage the yacht, and thus aid in taking himself to prison.

The constable sat in the cockpit, with his face fronting the youth, so that he could not be recognized by the three on the piazza.

Doctor Rowland seemed a trifle nervous at this.

Why was the boy free?

He had supposed him to be in prison, and now saw him returning in his yacht, which he, the doctor, well knew had been taken by the pirate chief the night before to effect his escape in.

He had reported the escape to the authorities, and that his valet, left to guard the prisoner, had evidently been bribed to aid him.

Of course no one blamed the doctor; but it was a great disappointment, and several small vessels had been hastily manned and sent in chase.

They had gone up the bay, and now the yacht was seen approaching, with Nick at the helm, and some unknown person accompanying him.

Could it be that the boy had escaped, and having captured the pirate chief, was bringing him back to prison?

With this thought, and which seemed a painful one to him, Doctor Rowland arose and walked down to the landing to meet the yacht, which he saw was putting in to his little dock.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEHIND THE BARS.

As the yacht luffed up and glided alongside of the pier of the Rowland Manor grounds, Doctor Rowland gave a sigh of relief when he beheld Constable Craig as the one whom he seemed to have dreaded as Burke, the Buccaneer.

He caught the painter and made it fast to an iron ring, while the constable stepped toward Nick and said:

"Pardon me, lad, but though I'm obliged to you for acting as deputy and fetching yourself to prison, I must do my duty—so hold out your hands."

Nick said not a word and silently obeyed, and the irons snapped about his wrists.

"Well, doctor, there have been strange doings, sir, the past twenty-four hours," said Constable Craig as he stepped ashore, followed by Nick.

"There have, indeed, Craig; but how is it I find you and that youth returning in my yacht, which was stolen by the buccaneer chief last night, when I thought you had your prisoner safe in jail?"

"Well, sir, I concluded to give the lad a chance, so took him on board the brig-of-war Breeze, and Captain Dean set sail with Nick as pilot, to hunt up the pirate."

"But he had left the basin, where Nick had left him, and in searching for him we came across Island Nell, the Fisher Girl, who had piloted him out to sea, believing the craft was an honest American war schooner."

"While she was on board they sighted your yacht there, and on it the chief and your valet,

and they let her have the little craft to return to you in, and she looked up the brig, found her, and told her story."

"Captain Dean went in chase, with prospects of success, while I took the boy ashore to the light-house, where Nell joined us, and I came on here with him, while she takes care of the light, for Mrs. Burton has left the island."

"Now you have it straight, doctor."

"And you think the brig will overhaul the pirate?"

"I hope so, sir, and it seems likely."

"And what about the story this boy told regarding his being forced to pilot the schooner to a haven?"

"I don't know, sir, more than that Mrs. Burton has left the light-house, and I am compelled to believe he is guilty."

"I feared so," said the doctor.

"It is false! I am as innocent of crime as either you, Doctor Rowland, or Constable Craig," hotly said the youth.

"Well, lad, I didn't tell you of something I found in the light-house, which condemns you, no more than I told the doctor about a little scene we had there which nearly cost me my life, for it was no use to implicate one who acted from love of you."

"But, lad, I found this letter there for you, and I wish to ask you if that is your mother's writing?"

"It is," cried Nick, as his eyes fell upon the superscription.

"Well, Nick, this letter condemns you, as you will see, if the doctor will read it to you."

Doctor Rowland took the letter and read it aloud, while behind him stood two listeners whose approach he had not heard.

They were Ruth and Vivian.

Nick saw them and simply inclined his head, in response to their smile and bow.

"Give me that letter!" he cried firmly, starting toward Doctor Rowland and raising his manacled hands.

"No, sir, this stands against you at your trial."

"It is false, every word of it, and my mother never wrote it," he said hotly.

"You just said that it was your mother's writing."

"So it seemed, but when I know its vile contents I know that not one word of it is hers."

"You cannot prove that, my lad," said the constable.

"No, for my mother is not here, and I fear that harm has befallen her."

"But it is useless for me to say anything to defend myself, for I am to be made a victim, and will meet my fate, be it what it may."

"Constable Craig, do your duty and take me to jail."

"Father, let me see that letter," said Ruth, stepping forward.

Doctor Rowland was about to hand it to her, when the constable quickly snatched it from his hand, while he said, earnestly:

"Excuse me, doctor, but I'm read up in a woman's ways, and I saw it in your daughter's eyes to destroy this interesting letter, so I was rude enough to grab it."

"You are right, Craig, for my daughter seems strangely determined to protect this youth, from the romantic sentiment of owing her life to him."

Ruth's face flushed angrily with commingled disappointment and anger, and, with a look at Nick, she turned away, drawing Vivian with her.

"Better take one of my row-boats, Craig, to avoid the crowd," suggested the doctor, and following the suggestion the constable and Nick entered a boat, and the former seizing the oars pulled rapidly toward the city, while Doctor Rowland returned to his piazza, not however, to be joined by Ruth and Vivian, who had retired to the seclusion of their own room.

Reaching the landing Constable Craig hurried Nick up to the jail, and the brave and unfortunate boy found himself behind iron bars in a felon's cell.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NUN.

SEVERAL days passed away, after the arrest of Nick Burton, and the story of his alleged alliance with pirates had gone abroad against him, along with the information that his mother had fled, leaving a letter to him to follow her, and thereby compromising him as indeed in league with the buccaneers.

Some shook their heads, yet refused to believe in the boy's guilt, while others were only too anxious to believe anything that was bad of any one.

Many hoped that the return of Captain Donald Dean in the Breeze, would clear the matter up, by a confession of the pirates, whom they hoped the brig would capture.

Doctor Rowland expressed himself strongly as believing in the guilt of the youth, and some asserted that he went out of his way to condemn one who had most nobly served him.

A trial was to be given Nick, as soon as the Breeze returned, and it was hoped that Nick could clear himself, though it seemed very doubtful.

Thus matters stood when one evening a person appeared at the prison asking to be admitted to give comfort to those inmates who were condemned to death, and would accept consolation from one who wished to pray for them.

The jailer, Michael O'Malley, was from Ireland and a good Catholic, and had it not in his heart to refuse entrance to one who came in the garb of a nun.

"The Vargin bliss you, leddy, and give comfort to them as you pray fer."

"It's ag'in' regulations to admit any one at night, but thin, bliss yer swate sowl you are after being as welcome as an angel."

"Thank you, and you too shall have my prayers," was the low reply, followed by a request to see those prisoners who most needed praying for.

"Bliss yer swate sowl, leddy, they all nades prayin' fer."

"There is after being Money Musk, a poor divil that is to be executed fer murderin' his mither-in-law, when she druv him to it."

"Thin comes Danny Benson, who stole himself inter jail for the life of him, and Antonio Resaca, a black-faced Cuban sailor who kilt his captain, and a pirate named Moro who tried to cut out a craft from our harbor, and—and—ah! there is after being a boy here who they calls a pirate; but I'm to hear the law say so afore I belaves it."

"Which will yez swate sowl say first, leddy?"

"Any one which you desire," came the low spoken response, and Michael O'Malley, a giant in form, brave as a lion, and with a heart as tender as a girl's, led the way to the cell of Danny Benson.

A few words of comfort to the wretch, a short prayer, some fruit, taken from a basket she carried under her gown, and the nun passed on to the cell of Money Musk, when the same performance was gone through.

Then the Cuban sailor was visited, and next the pirate, Moro, after which came Nick Burton.

"Would you have me pray with you, sir?" asked the nun softly.

Nick started, eyed the nun's veiled face to try and see it, and said:

"I would ask you to remember me in your prayers, lady, when you kneel to pray for yourself, and I thank you for this visit."

"Here is a little book for you to read, and some fruit for you, and remember you shall not be forgotten."

"The lad is not a Catholic, leddy; but he knows ther Vargin will have mercy upon him, if it is asked by your swate sowl," said Michael O'Malley, as he locked the cell door and led the nun out.

Nick had no light in his cell, so was compelled to await the coming of daylight, before he looked at his book.

But he threw himself upon his cot, and for hours lay awake in deep thought, for he felt that he knew the sweet nun who had called upon her errand of mercy, and between the lids of the little book he had found a note, which he clutched tightly.

With the first glimmer of dawn through the grated window of his cell, he arose and opened the book.

It was simply a Catholic Prayer Book, and among its leaves was the precious letter.

He opened it, and found no address, or name, simply, written in a delicate, feminine hand, the words:

"Unless Burke, the Buccaneer is captured by Captain Donald Dean, and can clear you of complicity with him, your trial will be a farce, for you will be quickly sentenced to die upon the gallows as a pirate."

"The writer of this believes you to be innocent; but dead, you remain in your grave with the stigma upon you."

"Alive, you can prove your innocence, and to do so must make your escape."

"You have friends working for you, so be surprised at nothing that may transpire, and be ready to take advantage of all means placed at your disposal to free you from an ignominious end."

"I felt that I was not wrong, for I knew the voice of her who came here, and this letter convinces me."

"Well, she believes me innocent, and she reasons well, that dead I can prove nothing, while alive I can."

"She is right, and, if I can escape, I will not remain here to be hanged like a dog for a crime of which I am not guilty, while I owe it to my poor mother, to get out and solve the mystery of what has been her fate."

"So be it, I am ready for what may come," and so saying Nick carefully destroyed the letter, after he had committed it to memory, and paced his little cell with firm step, until the jailer entered bearing his breakfast, which, untempting though it was, he partook of with real relish.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TORNADO.

THE day after the visit of the mysterious nun to the prison, a violent storm swept over the town of Portland, and lashed the sea into fury.

The tempest broke in its fierceness, just as the

sunset-gun was heard from the fort, and the peals of thunder that followed the piece of ordnance, completely drowned the roar of the cannon.

From their window in Rowland Manor, Ruth and Vivian had been watching the approach of the storm, and from the piazza below Doctor Rowland, grown strangely stern and moody of late, had also been gazing at the gathering tempest.

The two maidens had gazed with interest and some anxiety, at the small vessels running for the harbor, to find a haven of safety, and their eyes had also fallen upon a sail far off upon the watery horizon, evidently standing for the port, but the distance was so great she could not be made out.

"Let us take a glass and go to the tower, Viv," cried Ruth, and the two, drawing some wraps about them ascended to the stone tower of the manor, which commanded a grand view of the country around, and a magnificent sweep of the sea and far along the coast.

Turning the large glass upon the distant vessel, after a few moments' silence, Ruth cried earnestly:

"Vivian, it is the brig."

"The Breeze?" eagerly asked Vivian.

"Yes."

"Then to-morrow will tell the story."

"Yes."

"Is she alone, Ru?"

"Yes."

"No schooner near?"

"I understand you now; no, there is no vessel near her."

"Then she has not captured the pirate?"

"So it would seem."

"You are certain it is the Breeze?"

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt."

"But the storm will catch her before she reaches port."

"Yes, for see how savagely it looms up, and all the vessels in the harbor are letting fall two anchors and preparing to meet it, for it seems to be a real hurricane, and I never saw blacker clouds."

As she spoke the earth and sea were lighted up by a vivid flash of lightning, while the crash of thunder that followed, fairly shook the mansion to its foundation.

At the same moment darkness that seemed real night settled down upon the scene.

"Oh, Ruth, let us go below," cried Vivian in alarm.

Ruth cast another glance at the brig; but it was too dark to see her now, and she rapidly descended with Vivian, and they sought their chamber, and from the closed window still gazed out upon the appalling sight.

For some moments they thus stood, while servants hurried through the house closing the windows, and the boatman of the mansion was busy making all ship-shape at the little pier.

Then, with a discharge like a thousand cannon, and vivid glares of lightning came the storm upon them in all their fury, and from their lips broke forth the prayer:

"God have mercy upon the brig!"

After a few moments of vivid glare, the lightning ceased, and the night seemed to let fall an impenetrable veil of blackness.

"Seel seel!" cried Ruth, pointing from the window where they still stood, to a bright light far up the coast.

"It is the brig," cried Vivian.

"No, it is the light-house."

"Ah! that strange girl we met, has lighted the lamp."

"Yes, and it will guide the brig safely to port."

"If she has a pilot on board."

"Yes, I had forgotten that, for she may not have."

"Do you think she can live out this storm, Ruth?"

"God only knows; but I cannot believe it possible for a ship to float in such a gale and sea."

Again they were silent for some time, while the elements raged about them, the winds fairly rocking the mansion, and their howlings seeming like the wailing of the thousands of lost souls.

Below them, pacing his room with firm step and stern brow, was Doctor Rowland, the storm having driven him in from the piazza.

Now and then he would pause in his walk, and looking from the window, behold the same scene which met the eyes of the maiden from their room on the floor above him.

"This storm is as fearful as any I have seen in the Indies, and wrecks will strew the coast after it," he muttered.

"I hope no harm will befall the brig and her handsome young commander, for he is a dashing fellow, rich, well-born, and is in love with Ruth, and I have promised him my sanction if he can win her, which of course he shall do, as I have something to say about it, if the wayward girl refuses."

"By Heaven, I would kill that boy Burton with my own hand, ere he should win her from me."

"But that is impossible now, for he'll soon be hanged, and Ruth is coming to the belief that

he is a pirate, since I read her the letter of his mother."

"Well, it is a surprise to me to know he was guilty, even though Buccaneer Burke said he was not, for he is as brave a fellow as I ever saw, manly, and, were he rich and well-born would make no bad match for my child."

"But, as it is, he must die, and she shall marry Donald Dean."

Thus mused the doctor, until a bright flash far up the coast met his eyes, and soon after a deep booming sound.

Again came the flash, and once more the deep boom.

"Ha! that is a gun, and a signal gun at that."

"It is heavy enough to come from a vessel-of-war, and the craft is in a bad way on this coast without a pilot, and the night as dark as death."

"There it goes again, and it pleads loudly for a pilot, but there is no one among the islands to go to her aid, and no small craft could live in this sea and gale."

"Again it calls for help, and Heaven grant it be not the brig-of-war."

"Father! it is the brig-of-war," cried Ruth, rushing into the room, followed by Vivian, both of them pale as death.

"Then she is lost."

"Yes, lost, and would not be were that brave boy at his post on the light-house, for he could save her."

"But he lies in chains in his cell, while the brave ship pleads in vain for help, and is not far from the light-house."

"Oh father! Heaven have mercy upon you, if it is your hand that placed Nick Burton in jail, and now sends thereby those brave sailors to their doom."

Ruth spoke with almost anguish in her tones, and her impressive manner and stinging words caused Doctor Rowland to turn livid, as he walked to the window and placing his face against the glass gazed out into the inky darkness, uttering no response to his daughter's arraignment of him for what he had done.

CHAPTER XX.

AN APPEAL FOR HELP.

THERE were others who heard the appeal for help, fired by the brig-of-war, upon that night of fearful storm.

These were an old man and a maiden, who were seated in the cosy sitting-room of the light-house, the latter reading aloud.

They were Old Neptune and his granddaughter, Island Nell, who had been caring for the light-house since the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. Burton, and incarceration of Nick in the town jail.

Constable Craig, bearing no malice for the attack of the girl upon him, to rescue Nick, had gained for her the position of keeper, and the old man found his quarters there an improvement upon his log-cabin on the island, where he saw no human being other than Nell.

Nell had quickly mastered the duties, and instructed her grandfather in just what was to be done, for fear, as she said, she might be away some time and he have to light the lamp.

She had sighted the brig some time before sunset, but, as she had a good wind, expected her to reach Portland before dark, and then she had slipped out of her mind, until the deep boom of the heavy gun broke on her ears, when she had sprung to her feet in alarm.

Accustomed as they were to the storms sweeping among the islands, neither she or her grandfather had paid much attention to the tornado, other than to see that all was ready to meet it and that the glass windows were firmly closed, so that the wind would not put out the lamps.

Several times, as the cottage and island seemed to rock under the force of the winds and waves, Old Neptune had broken in upon Nell's reading to remark that the storm was as bad as any he had ever known in those parts, and the young girl had expressed a wish that no poor vessels were caught on a lee-shore in such a blow.

The boom of the heavy gun, however, told her that her hope was in vain, as she knew well what the brazen-throated cannon was calling for.

Instantly she threw on a man's heavy storm-coat and hat, and darted out into the tempest, while Old Neptune called out, as the cannon still pealed forth its cry for help:

"It's a war-ship, child, that fires those minute-guns."

"Find out where she is, and see if we can't send rockets to warn her off—though they must know the light, and thus tell where they are."

But Nell had already disappeared in the darkness, down toward the little basin that served as a harbor for the Light-house Island, and the old man closed the door and returned to his seat near the fire.

He was a man of striking presence, tall, broad-shouldered, but now stooping with age, and his hair and beard, both worn long, were white as snow.

He was dressed in a coarse sailor suit, yet looked more like one who should wear the uniform of one born to the quarter-deck.

His face was deeply bronzed, strongly marked, stern and yet not unkind, while his eyes were black and piercing.

Three-score years and ten, man's allotted span, had evidently passed over his head, and yet he seemed not one prostrated by age, for his movements were quick and his step firm, though of course time was beginning to tell upon his once upright form and iron sinews, and for some time he had attended to only the light duties devolving upon him in his daily and lonely life.

Such was Old Neptune, the Island Hermit, as he was called, as he sat by the fire awaiting the return of Nell.

But that daring girl had no idea of returning just then, for her fearless nature had been aroused by that pleading cry for help, and she was preparing to go to the aid of the gallant craft which she saw in the offing, and which the vivid flash of her minute-guns showed her had been badly crippled by the tornado, and was in vain striving to beat off the dangerous coast with what sail she could spread.

"If I can get to her I can save her," muttered Nell, working hard to get her surf-skiff ready for the struggle for life or death which she had determined to enter upon.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BREEZE IN A TEMPEST.

As Constable Craig had said, when the Breeze started in pursuit of Burke, the Buccaneer, she gained upon the schooner.

Somehow the latter vessel did not seem to be sailing as well as usual, and the brig continued to gain, until coming in range she opened fire.

The pirate briskly returned the fire, and accustomed almost daily to the use of their guns, the outlaws fired with far greater precision than did the crew of the brig, and a cheer burst from them, as they saw one shot cut away the bowsprit, and a moment after the foretopmast was brought to the deck.

This put the Breeze out of the chase, at least until she could repair damages, and the schooner went flying on her way, and when darkness came on the brig was far astern, but still coming on.

In the darkness the schooner changed her course, running close in-shore again, toward the New Hampshire coast, and when the morning dawned she had lost sight of her foe and completely threw her off her track.

While Burke, the Buccaneer, continued on his way to the West Indies, the brig continued her search for him for several days, and then convinced that she had been thoroughly eluded, put back for Portland, for she was undergoing repairs in port, when she started in pursuit of the schooner, and was by no means in good trim.

With his foremast crippled by the schooner's fire, a temporarily rigged bowsprit, no foretopmast, one of his men killed and several wounded, Captain Donald Dean was returning to port in no pleasant mood, and formed a mental resolve that when his vessel was once more in perfect trim, he would put to sea on a direct search for Burke, the Buccaneer.

As he neared port he saw the storm rising, and used every endeavor to reach an anchorage before it should strike him, for, in his crippled condition he feared his rigging would not withstand the force of the tempest.

He knew if he put back to sea again, the fury of the storm he would have to meet would be as bad, if not worse, and so he carried his vessel with all the sail he dared spread, hoping to reach the harbor, or get near enough to call out a pilot who could run him into some little haven among the islands.

With Nick acting as pilot when he ran out, he had not thought of having another on board to run him in, and saw his mistake as he reached port.

The storm arose as he watched it, in a manner that proved it would be a terrific blow, and he made all as ship-shape as possible to meet it, should he have to do so in open water, though he determined to keep his canvas aloft until the very last moment.

Thus the brig approached nearer and nearer to the land, her course almost direct for the light house.

Upon the deck, arrayed in his storm-suit, was Captain Donald Dean, his handsome face as placid as a May morning, for he did not show to his men the anxiety he felt.

Near him were his officers, chatting pleasantly together, though they cast many a fitful glance toward the coming storm.

Forward, the crew were also watching the rising tempest, and the older tars would shake their heads in an ominous way, as they glanced at the inky clouds and then at their crippled rigging.

Nearer and nearer the vessel approached the shore, and nearer and nearer came the tempest.

The sun had gone behind the black clouds, as it neared the western horizon, and a shadow, almost like night had fallen upon the sea.

Soon came the deep mutterings of the tempest, growing louder and fiercer each moment, and at the hour of sunset a darkness intense

fell upon the ocean and shut out the land from view.

At that moment the roar of the tornado became appalling, and instinctively every man went to his post of duty without orders.

Suddenly, out over the waters, like a beacon of hope, beamed the light in the island light-house, and the crew of the brig looked upon it as a good omen.

"Stand ready all!" cried Donald Dean, as the tempest grew louder and louder.

"Ay ay, sir," came the answer from the crew in cheerful chorus, and still on, to meet the tornado sped the brig, the breeze that was bearing her along, blowing right into the teeth of the fearful gale that was approaching at race-horse speed.

"Strip her clean, aloft and below!" shouted Donald Dean, and the men flew into the rigging, and in a few moments' time had the sails furled, while the brig still forged ahead from the impetus her sails had given her.

"Set the staysail forward there, single-reefed, and the mizzen-sail reefed down!" came the order of the young captain, who determined to meet the storm with just enough canvas spread to steady the vessel.

"Here it comes! luff sharp, helmsman, and dash right into its teeth.

"Steady as you are! hold hard, all for your lives!"

With the last word of Donald Dean the sea seemed to open beneath the bows of the brig, which darted downward, seemingly never to stop, and then, rising, higher and higher, upon the huge white wall of foam, she seemed as if she must go down stern-foremost, when she again assumed her proper position for an instant, while the snapping of ropes, the crashing of timbers, tearing of canvas and shouts of the crew told that the foremast had gone into the sea.

But the mainmast still stood, though tottering, and the bowsprit yet held its own.

Upon the rush of waters that had swept over the vessel, several of the crew had been borne off to death, and their cries for help were pitiful to hear, but no help could reach them.

The first shock of the tempest over, Donald Dean sought to bring his vessel to, as well as he could to ride out the gale.

Hardly had he begun on this, when he saw that the storm was sweeping around, and the tempest would soon have him upon a lee-shore.

His boats had been torn away, his bulwarks here and there stove in, and one cannon on the starboard broadside had gone into the sea, while another one was torn from its lashings.

It certainly was a critical moment; but the young officer issued his orders in trumpet tones, and the men, knowing well that they worked for their lives, were prompt to obey, and some order was soon formed out of chaos.

Seeing that he could not hold his vessel to the wind, he gave the order to let go the anchors, as the shore was not more than a league distant.

This was quickly done, and all watched the result; but only for a moment in breathless silence, for then came the cry in chorus:

"She drags her anchor!"

"Clear away that stern gun there, and signal for a pilot, for some daring fellow may come out to us!" came the order of the young captain, and a moment after the cry for help pealed forth from the brazen throat of a heavy gun.

CHAPTER XXII.

ISLAND NELL TO THE RESCUE.

It was known to Captain Donald Dean that several of the islands held a hamlet of the hardy fishermen of the Maine coast, and these bold sailors also served as pilots for incoming vessels when called upon to do so.

They were not generally to be found upon the sea islands, which were those bordering the ocean, but upon those in the bay, where they were more protected and found a better harbor-age for their boats.

Should they hear the signal gun of the brig, some of them might venture forth, not only from a humane motive, but also because they knew the reward would be a large one.

With his anchors dragging, Captain Dean well knew a couple of hours, with the gale from the quarter whence it had now beaten round, would put his vessel ashore, and death and wreck must follow.

With this knowledge, and the fear that a pilot might not respond to his signals, and he could hardly hope they would dare face such a tempest, the young commander began to rig a jury-foremast, the men working splendidly against the fearful odds they had to contend with.

Through all the signal gun was kept pealing forth its note of woe and supplication, and officers were keeping their eyes sweeping the wild waters in search of a coming boat.

At length, when the jury-mast was almost rigged, one of the anchor-cables parted, and the brig took a fearful lunge, stern-foremost, with the rebound.

The second anchor was dragged along now with ease, until, catching in some obstruction on the bottom it brought the brig up with a shock

that nearly jerked her sticks out of her and threw every man to the deck.

The cable withstood the terrible strain only for a moment, and then it too parted, and the brig went wallowing away landward.

Quickly orders were given to set what sail she would bear, and then the result was watched with breathless anxiety.

So fiercely did the wind blow, that the crippled brig could gain no headway into the teeth of the gale, and was slowly and surely blown landward.

With his boats gone, and a rocky coast half a league away, Donald Dean saw only death before him; but his brave nature did not succumb, and he determined to attempt the bold effort to run into the channel out of which the brig had come when Nick, the Light-house Boy, had been the pilot.

It was true that it was a desperate undertaking, for he could only guess at where lay the channel; but he would be no worse off if he missed it, than in allowing the vessel to drive on the rocks of her own accord.

Sweeping the shore with his glass, in an effort to find a break among the islands, there suddenly broke from his lips the ringing cry:

"Boat ho!"

A cheer fairly burst from the lips of the crew, at this cheerful cry, for all knew their doom unless succor came soon, and every eye was strained to find the coming boat.

"There she comes, almost aboard of us!"

"Stand ready, lads, to throw that daring fellow a line, and drag him on board, for he must lose his boat!"

So called out Captain Dean, and a score of ropes were hastily secured, coiled, and held in willing hands, while shout after shout arose to cheer the occupant of the frail skiff, which was now seen almost under their lee, and coming slowly on.

Breathlessly all waited the snow-white skiff, as it rose on the crest of a mighty wave, and then held their breath in suspense, as it disappeared, so fearful were they that it would be swamped.

Nearer and nearer, painfully slow, but very surely, the boat came on, and was soon within a few fathoms of the brig, and under its lee.

Then Donald Dean seized a line, and, springing into the main shrouds, he cast it with unerring aim.

The coil was seized by the occupant of the skiff, who had now let go the oars.

"Spring into the sea and we will draw you on board, my brave man," cried Donald Dean, as his men ceased their cheer over his success.

The one in the skiff quickly obeyed, and was soon dragged up the side and over the bulwark, amid the deafening shouts of the crew.

"Now, sir, can you save my brig?" asked Donald Dean, eagerly seizing the hand of the one who had dared death to come to his aid.

"I can, sir," was the confident reply, and then came the words:

"And there is no time to lose, so get your vessel dead before the wind, as I shall run in through Millrace Channel."

"By the beard of Neptune! you are no man!" cried Donald Dean, as he now saw the muffled form by the binnacle light.

"No, I'm a girl!" was the quiet reply.

"Island Nell, as I live!"

"Yes, and the only one, excepting Nick Burton, who could save your brig this night," was the cool response of the daring girl, as she stepped to the wheel and seized it with a firm and confident grip.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GIRL PILOT.

If the men felt a foreboding when they saw who was their pilot, they soon regained confidence when they remembered that the young girl had dared the fury of the fierce tempest, to come out to serve them, and this was increased as they beheld the manner in which she took the helm, and her orders were issued in a way that told she knew just what she was about.

Under the direction of Island Nell, Captain Dean had the vessel again put before the gale, under just enough sail to steady her, and the brig went driving along with fearful velocity.

With two men to aid her at the wheel, and in fact they did the work, for she rested her hand only firmly upon it, and indicated which way she wished it turned, in a low, firm tone, Island Nell kept her eyes on the light-house, rather than the dark outline of land ahead.

She seemed to wish to get her exact bearings, so that she could head directly for the inlet between the islands.

Twice as she neared the land she had the brig put about, and headed along shore for a short distance, and then, as though having decided upon her course, she told the helmsman:

"Steady as you are now, and hold her so until I tell you otherwise."

Then as she darted along the deck, running easily where the seamen could hardly stand, and springing upon the starboard bulwark grasped the stays of the jury-mast, while she peered into the impenetrable gloom ahead.

The light-house now shone directly on the port quarter, and, with it thus beaming the crew of the brig knew well that the land was not many hundred feet distant; in fact, the savage roar of the surf told them that a very few more minutes must tell their fate, whether it would be life or death with them.

Peering into the blackness ahead, Nell seemed to have discerned just what she was searching for, as suddenly her clear, ringing voice came back against the gale with:

"Port your helm, sharp!"

"Port it is!" shouted Donald Dean, through his trumpet, as his men at the wheel promptly obeyed.

"Steady now!"

"Steady 'tis!"

"Port her hard!"

"Hard-a-port 'tis!"

"Steady!"

"Steady 'tis!"

"Starboard! there, I have the break now before me."

"Steady as you are, and do not swerve an inch!"

Every word of command by the daring girl was distinctly heard upon the vessel, from stem to stern, and her orders were obeyed with a promptness and firmness that showed the crew knew that their sole dependence for life lay in her hands.

Going on the course now straight for the shore, the brig swept by a large rock over which the waves bounded high in air, and, upon the other bow was seen another equally as dangerous.

Like two giant sentinels they stood, guarding the entrance to the channel between the islands.

Then, with this danger past, the crew beheld a wall of foam off either bow, while dead ahead there was a narrow space that was all black.

This was the break between the islands, the channel entrance, and into it the Breeze fairly flew like a frightened bird, to be, a moment after, overshadowed by the trees that grew upon the islands upon either side.

With one accord the crew broke forth in a ringing cheer for

"The Girl Pilot."

But Nell remained at her post on the starboard bulwark, clinging to the jury-mast stay, and gazing into the darkness ahead, now blacker than ever, with the forest-clad islands upon either side.

The channel was narrow, deep, and ran like a mill-race, and through the opening in the trees the wind drove furiously, so that the brig sped along with frightful velocity.

A few moments of suspense, and the Breeze shot out into the bay, and then came the order, in exultant tones:

"Starboard your helm, hard! Steady as you are."

With the last word Nell sprang from the bulwark to the deck and retraced her way aft.

The brig was now gliding along, close under the lee of the wooded island, and approaching Donald Dean Nell said quietly:

"Your vessel is now safe, sir, and you can drop anchor where you please."

Donald Dean was deeply affected, at the noble act of the girl, and taking both her hands in his own, he spoke his thanks most earnestly, and then bade the maiden make herself at home in his cabin, while he added:

"And now, my sweet young lady, any favor you ask of me, in return for your gallant services, I will cheerfully grant, while I know that Uncle Sam will not forget one who has nobly done her duty in saving one of his vessels and its crew from destruction and death."

"I seek no reward, sir, either from you, or the Government, but I will ask a favor in return for what I have done," said Nell.

"Name it, and I will grant it."

"It is the release of Nick Burton from prison," was the firm response of Island Nell.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BREEZE RETURNS TO PORT.

It was a strange sight, the day following the storm, to the eyes of those on shore, to see the trim brig-of-war, Breeze, coming slowly up the harbor with a young girl at the helm as pilot.

The tempest had blown itself out about midnight, and the day following was bright and sunshiny, and only a gentle breeze was blowing, but the sea was yet rough, so terribly had it been lashed by the wind during the hours of the night.

The shipping in port had suffered considerably by the tornado, for several small vessels had been torn from their anchorage and gone ashore, and larger ones had lost topmasts and spars, while the town had been handled rather roughly, for a steeple or two had gone down, and roofs and chimneys scattered in fragments through the streets.

Rowland Manor however, stood firm and upon its piazza the following day, were the doctor and the two maidens, anxiously gazing seaward, for the Breeze, sighted just before the tornado broke, could nowhere be seen.

As they looked, however, the pretty craft

suddenly rounded a headland, and came into full view, the sight causing a cry of pleasure to burst from the lips of the two, as their eyes fell upon her.

"She has been roughly handled, for I notice her foremast is gone, and also her bowsprit, though she has a jury-mast rigged in the place of the former, and a spar for the latter," said Doctor Rowland, with his glass to his eye.

Her bulwarks appear to be stove in, in several places, father," Ruth remarked, and she also was observing the brig through a glass.

"Yes, that brig has had a hard time of it, and I only hope that Dean has escaped in safety; but he must have handled his vessel well indeed, to escape that fearful tornado."

"Yes, doctor; but see if that is not a girl at the wheel?" asked Vivian, who had taken Ruth's glass.

The doctor quickly leveled his spy-glass, and said excitedly:

"You are right, Vivian."

"Who can she be?"

"What can it mean?" Vivian asked.

Ruth had retaken her glass and was steadily gazing through it, and said slowly:

"It is that strange girl, wild as an Indian, and so very beautiful, we have often seen, and who is known as Island Nell, the Fisher Girl."

"Yes, my daughter, it is Island Nell, and she is said to be second only to that Light-house Boy as a pilot in these waters, so I would not be surprised if the brig owed her safety to the girl."

"But I will dip the colors in salute to Dean, as he sails by, and then signal him to come up and dine with us, so that we will know all."

With this Doctor Rowland left the piazza, and, followed by the two maidens, ascended the tower to the lookout on top.

Here was a flagstaff, and a stout chest containing flags and signals.

Taking out the American flag, Doctor Rowland ran it up to the mast, and then busied himself in selecting certain signal flags as the ones he needed.

These he held ready, and when the brig was nearly opposite to the mansion, he dipped his colors three times.

Almost instantly the salute was returned on board the brig, and then came three guns fired also in response to the honor.

"Dean recognizes us, girls, and gives us a gun apiece."

"Now, my signals, Ruth," cried Doctor Rowland, and he hastily lowered the flag and ran up signal after signal, saying:

"That says 'Glad to see you back safe; come and dine with us at three.'"

"He is answering you, sir," said Vivian, deeply interested in the signaling.

"Yes, and says:

"'With pleasure,' so that we will know soon just what has happened."

"I will have the carriage go after him," and hailing a servant Doctor Rowland bade him order the carriage go to the landing at two o'clock and fetch Captain Dean to the manor.

At the appointed hour the young captain arrived, happy at being able to meet Ruth Rowland again, and he received a warm welcome, for both of the maidens liked the handsome sailor.

"Well, Dean, you come back crippled?" said the doctor, as the four took seats upon the piazza until dinner was announced.

"I am sorry to say that I do, sir, in both vessels and men, for I have lost half a dozen brave fellows since I left port," sadly returned Donald Dean.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not overhaul the pirate, did you?"

"I got near enough, sir, to be crippled in my rigging by him, which threw me out of the chase and enabled him to escape, while his fire also did some damage among my crew."

"And he escaped, you say?"

"Yes, sir, for when I repaired damages he was hull down, and night coming on he easily eluded me."

"And the storm worsted you last night, too?"

"Badly, sir."

"I never saw a fiercer blow, and I am surprised that you saved your vessel, for you were right in its path."

"Yes, doctor, I crowded on canvas to try and reach port before it struck me, for I was in no condition to face it, and was unable to do so, and then had to take it all, and surely would have lost my brig, but for that daring girl, Island Nell, who came out alone in her surf skiff and was my pilot into a safe harbor and thus to port, after she had hailed her grandfather at the light-house, when we came by and bade him not be anxious regarding her."

"She is a noble girl, and deserves a large reward, Dean."

"The trouble is she refuses any reward."

"Bah! has she the same foolish ideas of that proud pauper, Nick Burton?"

"She refuses any reward, or rather will accept only one which I cannot give her."

"Ah! she strikes too high!"

"Oh, no, she demands only a favor."

"A favor?"

"Yes, doctor; but one I cannot grant, I am sorry to say."

"May I ask what that is, Dean?"

"That I release Nick Burton from prison."

Doctor Rowland fairly sprang to his feet in his amazement, while he said almost angrily:

"Of course you cannot grant that favor, for the young pirate must hang."

"So I fear, sir."

"Fear, Dean? Why you surely do not fear to have a criminal punished?"

"Oh, no, sir, if I could believe the boy guilty, which I cannot."

"But he is, for I know it, having the proofs."

"Ah! that alters the case, for I could not believe it otherwise."

"The proofs my father has, Captain Dean, Nick Burton says are forged in one case and false accusation and circumstantial evidence in the others, and, like you, I believe the young man wholly guiltless of the charges against him."

Ruth spoke out frankly, and her father frowned and looked stern; but a servant announced dinner and the party arose, Doctor Rowland saying:

"Well, Dean, as you have returned without Burke, the Buccaneer, the boy has no chance of proving his innocence, and will be at once tried, I suppose, and hanged."

"If guilty, yes, sir, and his trial begins tomorrow," was the reply of Donald Dean, as he offered his arm to Ruth to escort her in to dinner, the doctor accompanying Vivian, who, like her fair friend and hostess, looked very sad at the thought that Nick Burton was so soon to face his fate, be it what it might.

CHAPTER XXV.

BRANDED AS A PIRATE.

THE following day broke brightly, yet it was a day of gloom for Nick Burton and those who cared for him.

The youth had kept up a brave heart, and yet there was enough crushing upon him to cast him down.

He knew not what the fate of his mother was, and the letter, alleged to have been written by her and left in their little home for him, was a great surprise to him, for he felt assured that she had never written it, unless out of her mind, and yet it seemed certainly to be her writing.

Dressing himself neatly, for his chest had been brought to him in his cell, Nick was ready to go to his trial.

It was held in the court-room, and thither Constable Craig led him.

The room was crowded with people, and among them Nick recognized many faces of those who had been his friends in the past.

The greatest curiosity was evinced to see "the young pirate" as he was called, and there was a sensation when he entered, side by side with Constable Craig, and with his hands manacled.

Nick took his seat without a word, calm yet pale, and cast his eyes quickly over the crowded room.

As he did so he saw three persons enter.

They were Ruth, her father and Vivian Moreland.

The doctor wore a satisfied look, while both of the maidens were pale.

Then Nick took a look at his judge, and found it to be Captain Donald Dean, while his officers then in port were to sit as his jurors, for his was not an ordinary case, and in those days with men accused of piracy, the military and naval authorities held supreme power.

Donald Dean's face wore a stern, yet sad expression, and his sympathy seemed to be with the prisoner.

The court was soon called to order, and in a few words, amid a deathlike silence, Captain Dean said:

"Nicholas Burton, arise."

Nick promptly arose and stood calmly gazing upon his accusers.

"You are charged, Nicholas Burton, with the worst crime with which man can be branded, for it is said that you are leagued with pirates."

"What do you plead against this charge?"

"I plead innocence, for I am no more guilty than are my accusers," came the response in a fierce, clear voice.

"It is to be sincerely hoped that you can prove your innocence, so produce all the evidence in your behalf."

"I have no evidence but my word, and the past good character I have held among those who know me."

"Circumstantial evidence is against me, for I was captured among pirates, and when they were attacking a house, but I knew not that I was acting as the pilot of outlaws, and that other than those who came in the boat with me, intended to approach the mansion."

"This is all I can say in my behalf."

"Tell the story of your meeting Burke, the Buccaneer, and acting as his guide upon his murderous raid against the home of Doctor Rowland."

In a few words Nick made known the facts of the case.

Then Doctor Rowland was called upon, and

gave his testimony, telling how he disliked to say one word against the youth who had saved his life, and the lives of those most dear to him; but, if he was guilty, as it certainly appeared, he would not wish to protect a criminal from justice, for their town, with Nick Burton, to serve as a pilot for pirates, might be burned and sacked at any time.

The words of Doctor Rowland made a deep impression, and it could be seen that he had adroitly worked upon the fears of the citizens.

Then he told the story of the visit of the buccaneer chief, and his seeing Nick in the midst of the pirates, and of the capture of Burke afterward, by Captain Wilder, of the harbor police, who left the prisoner for his valet to guard, and who, bribing his keeper, had made his escape, but who had told him, Doctor Rowland, when he had asked him, that Nick Burton was really leagued with him.

The testimony of the doctor made a deep impression upon all, for no one could doubt him, and then Constable Craig was called upon for his evidence.

He gave it in a way that showed it was distasteful to him to condemn the youth, and the letter he had found in the light-house sitting-room was read aloud.

Then the letter was passed around to witnesses who knew the handwriting of Mrs. Burton, and it was pronounced genuine.

Others were then called up who had known Nick for some time, and it was admitted that he had left home and been gone for some years, and upon his return had seemed to have considerable money to spend, for he had fitted up the light-house cottage almost luxuriously.

Fishermen and others testified that he seemed to spend most of his time in sounding the channels and studying them, as for some deep purpose, and that he now and then had disappeared for days at a time, while his movements and life were certainly mysterious.

Nick heard all without the quiver of a lip, and it became evident to him that they intended to hang him, and appearances certainly seemed against him, as he was forced to mentally admit.

At last all of the testimony was heard, and the case was put in the hands of the six officers, Donald Dean delivering his charge in a way that showed he really believed the youth to be guilty, though he seemed to deeply regret that it was so, and pained at the duty he had to perform.

Again, at his command, Nick Burton arose. "Prisoner," said Captain Dean in a deep, impressive tone, "you have been impartially tried, and the finding of this court-martial is that you are guilty."

Nick bowed, while a deathlike silence reigned in the room.

"Being guilty, Nicholas Burton, of piracy, it remains for me to pass sentence upon you without delay.

"That sentence, it is my painful duty to tell you, is death.

"Two weeks from this day you are to be taken on board the brig-of-war *Breeze*, where she lies at anchor in the harbor of Portland, to be hanged at the yard-arm, and may Heaven be merciful to your guilty soul."

There came a sob here and there to break the deep silence of the room; but cool, fearless, bright-eyed Nick Burton met his sentence, bowed, and turning to Constable Craig, said in a voice that had not the slightest tremor:

"I am ready, sir, to go back to my cell."

Upright, with firm step and defiant mien, Nick Burton walked out of the room where his doom had been pronounced, and returned to his cell in the town jail.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TWO NUNS.

MICHAEL O'MALLEY, the good-hearted jailer of the Portland prison, sat alone in his little room, smoking his pipe.

The cases of the day were over, and he was taking his ease, after having had his supper.

He was a bachelor, was Michael O'Malley, so had no one to comfort him in his dismal home.

The prisoners were locked in their cells for the night, and at the first entrance Michael O'Malley stood guard, while the only other person on duty was his assistant, whose station was at a side entrance.

At midnight the jailer and his assistant would be relieved from duty by two other officials of the jail, who were then out upon the street enjoying their leisure.

It was the second night following the day of trial, when Nick Burton had been branded as a pirate, and the jailer was thinking over the matter, as he calmly puffed away at his pipe.

"Well, well, human nature are powerful desavin, and no mishake," he muttered; "now it's meself w'd be afther belavin' that boy innocent as a lamb, and yit the court-martial makes a bloody pirate out of him.

"Glory be to God! but the ways of this wurruld is afther bein' desavin' intirely, and it's meself is no reader o' human nature if that boy hain't as innocent as Father Mulcahey's pig—Begorra! who the devil is that?" he cried, as the bell of the gate sounded.

"Who is it afther being?" he called out through the loop-hole, too cautious to open the door.

"The nun whom you so kindly admitted once before, good Jailer O'Malley," came in the sweetest of tones.

"Mother o' the suffering Moses be praised! that beautiful leddy has come ag'in, good luck to her swate soul," said Michael as he hastily unbarred the door.

As two forms entered, Michael O'Malley gave a slight start, but the one he had before seen, said softly:

"I feared to come alone to this dismal place, Jailer O'Malley, so brought with me good Sister Innocence."

"It's all right, my leddy, and yez is both as welcum as sunshine; but phat is it yez is afther having there?"

"Fruit and other things for the prisoners, and, good man, as this entrance is on the main street, where many people are going to and fro, will you kindly let us leave by the private entrance in the rear?"

"With pleasure, leddies, for it does me ould sowl good to plaze yez—no, no, don't be afther giving me thim delicacies, for I'm a strong man with a good conscience, and kin ate with a relish, so let the poor divils inside as is troubled in mind, and must have swates to timpt thim, have all the good things."

"No, we have plenty for them, too; so if you will let the keeper at the other gate know that we can pass out, we will be obliged to you, and you shall have our prayers for your happiness."

"God foriver bliss yez swate sowls, leddies."

"I will tell Pat Laferty, as soon as I hev conducted yez to the criminals' dens, and it's yez kind wurruds that will be afther cheerin' thim up."

With this Michael O'Malley led the way into the prison corridor, and the two nuns began their errand of mercy, while the jailer went in to tell Pat Laferty of his visitors, and to allow them an exit through his gate, after which he returned to his post out at the main entrance.

As soon as they were alone the nuns hastily went from cell to cell, with a kind word to the prisoner within, and passing through the grating the fruit and other delicacies they had brought.

"This is his cell," whispered the nun, whose first visit had been made alone to the prison, as she halted by the grated door of Nick Burton's cell.

Within, the prisoner was pacing to and fro in the dim light coming from the corridor lamp.

He had heard the voices in the corridor, and suddenly saw a dark lantern opened and flashed upon him.

There stood two slender persons in the garb of nuns, and their veils being drawn back, the beautiful faces of Ruth Rowland and Vivian Moreland were revealed.

Nick started, trembled, turned crimson and then deathly pale, while he said:

"Oh! why have you thus risked yourselves?"

"To save you, and there is no time to lose," quickly answered Ruth.

"But you will get yourselves into trouble."

"No, for no one knows who we are, and we are believed to be Sisters from the Catholic Protectorate over here; so put on this dress at once—it is that of a nun—and by stooping you can disguise your height."

"But two of you came in, so how can three go out?"

"We arranged with the keeper to allow us to go out of the rear gate, and you and Vivian can go that way, while I return through the main entrance, telling Jailer O'Malley that I preferred to come by and say good-night to him."

"But my departure will get poor O'Malley into trouble!"

"No, for no one will believe that he would accept a bribe, and who would suspect that nuns would enter a prison to aid a prisoner to escape?"

"You argue well, Miss Ruth; but I would rather remain here and meet my cruel fate, than by leaving, get you and your sweet friend into trouble, and have O'Malley suffer."

"You are a brave man, Nick Burton; but how can you prove your innocence here?"

"I cannot."

"Then take advantage of the chance now offered you and escape, for you owe it to yourself, and to your mother, whose fate, you said in the court-room you were ignorant of."

"True, Miss Ruth, and I will escape that I may some day prove to you that I do not deserve the brand they have put upon me."

"In one moment I will be ready."

They handed him the bundle containing the nun's robe and veil, while Vivian said:

"Here are the keys, Ruth."

"Ah! I had not even thought of that; the cell door is locked."

"True, but I observed when here before, where Mr. O'Malley kept his keys, and in putting down the things I brought him to-night, Vivian took them up unseen by him."

Then the door was cautiously unlocked, and Nick stepped out into the corridor, and, by

bending his knees, appeared no taller than was Ruth, by whose side he stood.

"Now, Vivian, go with Mr. Burton, while I return to the jailer, and I will join you at the appointed place," said Ruth, as she turned and walked down the corridor, while the prisoner and his fair guide went in the other direction, to leave the jail by the rear gate.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THWARTED.

MICHAEL O'MALLEY had enjoyed eating some of the delicacies left him, and then resumed his pipe, for his assistant had been instructed to call him, when the nun came to the gate, as he said:

"I wish to bid their swate selves good-by, luck to them fer dear cr'atures."

For some time he mused, as was his wont, and then started up as he heard a footstep near.

"Lor' bliss you, leddy, it is yez own sw'ate self; and where is your sw'ate twin sowl afther being?" he said, as he recognized Ruth.

"She is more timid than I am, sir, and has departed by the rear gate, while I wished to come this way and thank you for your kindness in allowing me to give comfort to the poor men you have under your control."

"Bad luck to me, leddy, the day I'd refuse one wearing your holy garb, for I am a good Catholic, if I be a jailer, and want your prayers for meself whenever your swate lips is willing to send my name up for mercy for a miserable sinner."

Ruth was touched deeply by the words of the honest jailer, and her conscience gave her a twinge of pain at the way in which she was deceiving him; but then she thought that he would not be made to suffer, while, if she did not aid Nick Burton, he would surely die.

The worst that would be done to the jailer would be to dismiss him from his position, and should this occur, Ruth had already made up her mind that he would be the recipient of a liberal donation from her, out of her "pin-money," which she had saved up, for her father was lavish in the extreme, in giving his daughter all that she would ask for.

"Do you believe the young Light-house Boy guilty of the charges against him?" asked Ruth, anxious to have the opinion of the jailer regarding Nick.

"Well, leddy, I am one o' the upholders o' ther majesty o' ther law, and I is afther belavin' all thet ther law says is so, and it says as how thet handsome young gentleman is guilty, so I must belave the verdict of coorse."

Ruth sighed, but said no more, and slipped into the jailer's hand a purse of gold.

"Phat is this afther being for, me leddy?" he asked in surprise.

"It is for yourself," she answered.

"I have done nothing to deserve this, my leddy."

"Well, keep it, for yourself, if you wish; if not, you may find some way to do good with it," and Ruth was moving toward the door, when suddenly, out of the room, into which the men's corridor entered, appeared the keeper of the other gate.

"Well, Mither O'Malley, its meself thet hes lost the keys of the rear gate, and the two good sisters, the Lord rest their sowls, cannot git out at all at all, so I'm afther coming to git your kay."

"Be the powers, I hev your kay meself, having brought it away with me accidental-like, and you may let ther swate leddy out, as she is afraid to be afther going through the crowded strate, and it's not the loikes o' meself thet blames her."

"But Mither O'Malley?"

"The same to you, Pat Laferty."

"I thought yez was afther sayin' there was two of the howly sisters."

"And so says I, Mither Laferty."

"Well, there be two of thim at the rear gate, and one o' thim here."

Ruth turned deadly pale at this, but her veil hid her emotions.

What to say she did not know, and gazed at the jailer speechlessly while he exclaimed:

"Two of thim yez say, Pat Laferty?"

"Yis, Mither O'Malley."

"The Lord be betwixt us an' harum, but I let only two of them in and now you say there be two."

"There do certainly be two, Mither O'Malley."

The jailer turned to Ruth and said:

"Laddy, will yez be afther explaining this to meself, for I was bewildered."

"One moment and I will explain," cried Ruth hopefully, adding:

"If you will only allow me to see you alone?"

Michael O'Malley was quick-witted, and he felt that he had been imposed upon, though for whom, or for what reason he could not understand.

He was honest too, and, if caught in a trap, he intended to extricate himself as best he could.

So he said:

"Laddy, phat yez hes to say to Michael O'Malley must be said before Pat Laferty."

"But it is necessary that I see you alone," urged Ruth.

"No, speak out, leddy."

"Well, I confess that I came here to rescue a prisoner, and if you and your assistant here will permit him to go, disguised as he is, I will pay into your hands one year's pay to each, according to what you receive here for your services, and furthermore, I will pledge myself to get positions for you both elsewhere, should you lose your places here for what you to-night do for me."

"Leddies, why yez is afther trying to rescue a prisoner yez is afther knowing best; but if yez gave me his weight in gold, I'd not be the man to betray him as placed me here, and Pat Laferty being from ould Tipperary is of the same opinion as meself."

"Quick, Pat, we must be afther sa'zin' ther prisoner."

Ruth could utter no word, and stood like a statue, while the jailer seized an old musket and accompanied by Pat Laferty, walked toward the rear gate.

The jailer had told her to come, and mechanically she did so, and soon they reached the gate, where Vivian and Nick stood anxiously awaiting the return of the keeper.

"Howld on there, for yez is my prisoner, and I is afther knowing all," cried Michael O'Malley, advancing with his gun covering Nick.

In vain had Vivian urged the youth to scale the wall and escape; but he refused to leave her to face with Ruth the trouble that must follow discovery, and hence, when he saw that they were found out, and resistance was useless, he rose to his full height, threw aside his robe and dress, and said in a manly way:

"The plot has failed, jailer; but do you know who these two ladies are?"

"I do not."

"Then be a man and let them go unknown, while you lead me back to my cell, and you and Pat Laferty keep your mouths sealed about to-night's work."

"The leddies can be afther going, and it's not meself that will raise a leddie's veil, so who they are I doesn't care to know, no more does Misther Laferty; but, being as yez has sich good friends, Masther Nick Burton, I'll just be afther hinting to Captain Donald Dean to kape yez on board the brig ontel hanging time, and thus rel'ave Pat and meself of the responsibility of k'aping you."

"I thank you, O'Malley, for your kindness to these ladies, and I am ready to return to my cell," was the response of Nick, and turning to the two maidens he extended a hand to each, while he said impressively, yet in a voice that did not quiver:

"God bless you both for what you have done for me, and remember, I tell you, as a dying man might say, that I am not guilty, and I will meet the fate I am doomed to suffer like a man."

"Farewell!"

They bowed their heads, and sobs broke from their lips, as they turned away and were allowed to leave the jail yard, while Nick Burton was led back to his dismal cell, happy at least in the thought that neither Ruth or Vivian were known to have been his friends in the garb of nuns.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RUTH'S CONFESSION.

THE day after the failure of Ruth and Vivian to rescue Nick Burton, Captain Donald Dean was visiting at Rowland Manor.

Doctor Rowland had invited him to remain to dinner, and he had accepted, when Ruth joined in the invitation, though he could not understand why both of the maidens seemed so very *distract* and sad.

Shortly before dinner a messenger arrived at the mansion with an important letter for the young naval captain, which, after excusing himself for doing so, he opened and read.

Twice he read the letter, and he looked annoyed and puzzled.

"No bad news I hope, Dean?" said the doctor.

"Well, as I am with friends I may as well make known the contents of this epistle though of course I would ask that it go no further."

The doctor said:

"Of course not."

The maidens simply bowed, and Captain Dean continued:

"It is a let'er from Jailer O'Malley."

Ruth and Vivian started and turned pale, while Donald Dean continued:

"And I will read it aloud."

Then he read as follows:

"CITY JAIL."

"CAPTAIN DONALD DEAN:—

"Sir:—I have to report to you, sir, that an attempt was made last night, by two ladies, attired as nuns, to rescue from prison Nick Burton, the Boy Pirate."

"The attempt would have been successful but for Pat Laferty, my assistant losing his keys, and I would respectfully request that you take the prisoner on board the brig for safe-keeping, as I feel that other efforts will be made to release him and anybody approached may not be above accepting gold for services rendered."

"Who the ladies are Pat Laferty does not know,

but I feel that I do, though I shall not betray them unless you demand it."

"I shall hold the prisoner subject to your orders."

"I am, sir."

"Your obedient servant,

"MICHAEL O'MALLEY, Jailer."

A silence fell upon all, broken at last by Captain Donald saying:

"I shall demand to know who these ladies are, that they may be watched, for—"

"Captain Dean, you need not force the knowledge of who they are from this jailer, for I will tell you," said Ruth firmly.

"You, Miss Ruth?"

"Yes, they were none other than Ruth and myself."

"Great God! my child do such an act as this?" cried Doctor Rowland, while Captain Dean fairly sprung to his feet in amazement.

"Yes, father, I tried to rescue Nick Burton; and Vivian, at my entreaty, aided me, and God only knows how sorry I am that we failed."

"You did this, Miss Rowland?" asked Captain Dean in utter amazement, while the doctor paced the room with set lips and angry brow.

"I did, sir!" was the firm reply.

"And so did I!" added Vivian, with equal firmness.

"May I ask your motive, ladies?" asked Donald Dean, coldly.

"Our motive was to save one from the yard-arm whom we believe wholly innocent of the crime for which he has been tried and sentenced, and also one to whom we owe our lives."

"He saved me from a fearful death once, Captain Donald Dean, and a second time saved me, with my father and Vivian, at the risk of his own life."

"For these reasons I sought to rescue him, that he might, living, prove that he was innocent; when dead, he must rest in a dishonored grave."

"Now, sir, you know our motive, and we only regret that we were unsuccessful."

Donald Dean's eyes brightened as he arose and approached the two girls, while he said in a low tone:

"Miss Ruth, I appreciate fully the motive of yourself and Miss Vivian, and I honor you for it, and pledge you that this secret shall be known no further."

Both Ruth and Vivian were touched by the generosity of the young sailor captain, and though deeply pained at their unsuccessful, determined to at least be cheerful before their guest, and so appeared during dinner.

Leaving the doctor and the captain to enjoy their cigars, they left the table and hastened to their rooms, when Vivian said:

"You whispered that you had something important to say to me, Ruth."

"Yes, I have another plan for the rescue of Nick Burton."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; so help me to dress up in your midshipman brother's uniform, which got into your trunk by mistake, and my word for it Nick Burton shall escape, if pluck will do it, this night."

And ten minutes after, no one would have recognized in the supposed dashing young midshipman that left the Rowland mansion, the belle and heiress, Ruth Rowland.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RUTH PLAYS HER LAST CARD.

A PARTY of seamen were congregated in the drinking-room of a small sailor's inn situated not very far from the jail.

They were Jack tars awaiting orders to join their vessel, an American sloop-of-war soon to be ready for sea and were whiling the time away as best they could.

Suddenly the outer door opened and a young midshipman peered into the room and after a glance around shrunk back again.

A moment he stood in hesitation, and then boldly entered and walking up to the landlord said something to him in a low tone, emphasizing it by slipping a gold-piece into his hand.

"Ah, yes, sir, you can have a room, certainly, and I will send some of the lads to see you."

"About how many, please?" said the landlord.

"Five will do," was the response of the midshipman, and he followed the landlord out of the room into a small chamber above stairs.

In a few minutes more five seamen entered, and seeing a young officer politely saluted.

The midshipman drew his cap down over his eyes, and arranged the lamp-shade so that he sat in shadow, while the faces of the men were revealed to him distinctly.

"Lads, I have a little work for you to do for me," said the midshipman in a low voice.

"Well, sir, we are the men, if we can serve you," said one, speaking for them all.

"Men, I have here about ten sovereigns apiece for you, if you will do my work as I wish it done, and I will show my trust in you by paying you in advance."

"You are to go to the town jail, and one of

your number is to act as an officer, for I will give you the money to go to a junk-store and fit yourselves out."

"Four of you are also to carry muskets, and you are to serve as a guard for a prisoner there."

"Say to the jailer, Michael O'Malley, that Captain Donald Dean received his letter, and sent you to convey the prisoner, Nick Burton, on board the brig-of-war Breeze."

"When he is in your power bring him to this place, where I will await you."

"Do you understand my instructions fully?"

"Yes, sir, fully."

"Then go at once to the junk-shop, and fit yourselves out with muskets, while you secure the uniform of a naval lieutenant, and you have no time to lose, for what is done must be done at once."

"Here is the money."

The sailor took the extra gold handed to him and the party hastily left the room.

They knew the junk-shop well.

It was kept by a Jew, and contained odds and ends, I might say, from all over the universe.

A bargain was quickly made for four muskets, a sword, belt and officer's uniform, and putting on the latter and buckling the belt about his waist, the leader of the little party bade his followers take up their muskets and follow him, the Jew letting them out of a rear door into the alley.

It was such a common sight in those days to see armed men in the streets of the town, that the little party of five attracted no attention, and besides, it was growing late at night.

The pretended guard of sailors reached the jail without incident, and a ring on the bell brought Michael O'Malley to the wicket.

The leader addressed him in a pompous manner, with:

"Jailer, Captain Dean received your letter and has sent me with a guard, after your prisoner, Nick Burton, whom I am to convey on board the Breeze."

"All right, sir, and glad am I to have him go."

"Walk in, gentlemen, and wait while I fetch the young pirate," and Michael O'Malley walked off down the corridor.

In a few moments he returned, and accompanying him was Nick Burton.

"I put the bracelets upon him, loot'nent, for safer kee-ping," said the jailer, pointing to the handcuffs.

"That was right, jailer; but give me the key," was the answer of the pretended officer.

Michael O'Malley handed over the key, and was unlocking the gate to allow the guard to pass out with their prisoner, when the rumble of wheels was heard, and stopping in front of the jail a moment after, the tall form of Donald Dean stepped into the yard.

"Ho, Jailer O'Malley, what means this?" cried the young captain, taking in all at a glance.

"Merely obeying your orders, sur."

"My orders? Pray explain!"

The jailer did so, and Nick Burton looked as surprised as did Captain Dean.

"My man who sent you here?" and Donald Dean turned to the rigged-up sailor.

"A young midship, sir."

"My man, you have been paid to do this, and you shall suffer for it, unless you make a clean breast of it."

"Jailer, lead your prisoner back to a cell for the night, and to-morrow I will myself come with a guard for him, so do not deliver him even upon my written order."

"Now, my man, lead the way to the midshipman you are acting for."

The men saw that they were in a bad situation, and were willing to work out of it as best they could, so they went off for the little tavern, Donald Dean in their midst.

Captain Dean glanced into the saloon and seeing half a dozen of his own crew there called them out.

"Jeffreys," he said to one of them.

"Guard these men until my return."

"Now, landlord, show me the room of your midshipman guest," and mine host not daring to disobey led the way up-stairs, and pointed out the door of the room in which the supposed midshipman was anxiously awaiting the return of the party with the prisoner.

CHAPTER XXX.

A STRANGE LOVE SCENE.

A TAP upon the door of the room, was followed by a low:

"Come in!"

Raising the latch Donald Dean entered the room and gave a start, his face flushing, then paling, as he quickly closed the door behind him.

The occupant of the room also crimsoned, and then became white as a corpse.

"Miss Rowland!" fairly gasped the young captain.

"Captain Dean," was the low response.

"You here, and in this disguise, when only half an hour ago Miss Moreland gave me your

regrets at not seeing me to say good-night, upon the plea of a sick headache?"

"It is useless to disguise more, sir, for I am fairly caught, and you being here but proves that I have been betrayed," said Ruth petulantly.

"No, your daring plot worked well, and I give you credit for wonderful pluck and strategy; but I drove up to the jail just as your guard was leaving with the prisoner; but, as I now know that they were acting under your orders, I shall investigate no further, but send them away without divulging the secret of your identity."

"Captain Dean, you are very kind."

"I am very much hurt, Miss Rowland, to see how persistent you are to rescue that young man from the doom that has been pronounced upon him."

"It is because I feel that he is guiltless of the crime for which he is sentenced, and more, because, having twice saved my life, I wish to do as much for him."

"Your motive is a noble one, Miss Rowland, and I would be a very happy man were I the object of your solicitude, as is Nick Burton; but alas, though your father has bid me hope, I see nothing in your conduct toward me to cause me to feel that I can ever win more than your friendship."

He had never said before this much to her, and now he gazed straight into her face.

Approaching him, she took his hand and said earnestly:

"Captain Dean, my father has told me that you did me the honor to ask him for my hand, and he has consented, and fondly hopes that I may be your wife."

"I respect you, I admire you, and, as a friend you are very dear to me, for I appreciate your nobleness of nature and true worth."

"But, frankly, I do not love you; yet, if you wish to take me upon such terms, hoping to win my love in the future, I promise to be your wife, upon one condition."

The man was fairly startled at the frank manner of the girl, and, while his face flushed with joy he said eagerly:

"Name the condition, Miss Ruth."

"I know that I dare not ask you to openly do an act that is, from the stand-point of an officer, wrong."

"But, Captain Dean, if you will connive at the escape of Nick Burton, when he is free, I will pledge myself to become your wife whenever you wish, and as such, will ever do my duty toward you."

Donald Dean was astounded.

But duty with him was paramount to all other considerations.

He would have given his right hand to win Ruth Rowland's love, but he would not yield one jot or tittle of his honor to do so.

So he said slowly and impressively:

"Ruth, I would die, if thereby I could make you happy; but I cannot, even to claim you as my wife, degrade myself by betraying the trust put in me by my Government, so I am compelled to refuse, and, bitter as it will be for me to do so, I must carry out my duty fully and hang Nick Burton to the yard-arm."

Ruth bowed her head in silence and thus stood.

She knew the man and that it would be useless to plead more.

After awhile she said:

"Captain Dean, I have your answer, and let to-night be forgotten between us."

"The men I inveigled into my little scheme, be good enough to release, and, as a friend, I ask you to see me home, or at least to the grounds, for my disappointment, bitter in the extreme, has completely unnerved me."

"I am wholly at your service, Miss Rowland, and, at your command shall release the men, and also forget wholly the part you have taken to-night."

"I will go down and dismiss the men, and will await you at the door leading into the street."

Ruth bowed, and Donald Dean went below, and said:

"Lads, you are at liberty to go; but beware how you play any more such practical jokes as the one attempted to-night, and, for your own sakes, I advise you to keep quiet regarding what you have done."

"We will, sir," said the pretended officer, and the five men walked away gleefully, while Captain Dean turned to his own men, and giving to each one of them a gold-piece, said:

"Lads, take this for a luck piece, and keep silent about this affair."

The sailors thanked their captain whom they were devoted to, and returned to the little saloon, while Ruth came timidly down the steps, and taking the young sailor's proffered arm walked rapidly away with him.

It was after midnight when they reached the gate leading into the garden, and here Donald Dean left Ruth with a quiet good-night, and she ran into the house. Vivian, who was watching for her at the window, opening the door for her, and throwing herself upon a divan she cried in agony of spirit:

"Vivian, all is lost, for I have been foiled in

the very moment of success, and poor Nick Burton is doomed, for no power on earth can save him now."

CHAPTER XXXI.

ISLAND NELL'S RESOLVE.

THERE was one person at the trial of Nick Burton who was a most attentive observer of all that took place.

That one was Island Nell.

She hunted a quiet corner, where few could observe her, and hardly moved through all that transpired.

She heard the testimony of Doctor Rowland, and during the time that he was upon the witness stand her brow was dark and threatening.

After the doom was pronounced against Nick Burton, she quietly left the court-room, and going to the shore sprung into her light sail-skiff and started for the light-house.

"Grandpa, you must look after the lamps for some days, as I have duties that may keep me constantly away," she said, as she sprung ashore just at sunset, and her grandfather met her at the landing.

"What business can you have away from here, my child?" the old man said petulantly.

"You know that I owe my life to Nick Burton?"

"Yes, Nell."

"Well, they have arrested him as a pirate, tried him, found him guilty and sentenced him to be hung at the yard-arm."

"No, Nell," said the old man in great surprise.

"It is true, and he is as innocent as I am, and I do not intend that they shall hang him if I can help it."

"You have a good heart, Nell," said Old Neptune admiringly.

"Yes, and I have more—I have pluck to carry out my plans, and I shall go to the city to-night."

"What for?"

"To get Nick out of jail."

"How can you?"

"I do not know until I have tried."

"You are but a girl."

"True, but one who knows not fear, and who will do much for one she—she—regards as a friend," she said, in a confused kind of way.

"Well, Nell, you know best."

"Yes, grandpa; and you must look after the lamps, for it is not hard to do; and should any one come here and ask for me, simply say that I am off fishing, or anything else you please."

"I will, Nell; but they will see you in the town."

"No, for I shall take Mrs. Burton's dresses, caps, and your gold-rimmed spectacles, and make up as an old woman, so that no one will know me."

"You are a strange girl, Nell."

The maiden made no reply, but went up to the tower and lighted the lamps.

Then she cooked supper, and put everything necessary for her grandfather to use in a convenient place, and, leaving him smoking his pipe, went to her room, that which had been Mrs. Burton's.

An hour she was absent, and then there glided into the room a woman who caused Old Neptune to rise hastily, bow, and say:

"Good-evening, lady; but how did you land without our knowing it?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Grandpa, I am well made up, if you do not know me," laughed Nell, who was rigged out in Mrs. Burton's dress, bonnet, and her grandfather's spectacles.

"Nell, I thought it was poor Mrs. Burton herself; but then I had not seen her but a few times, you know."

"Well, I'll pass, I guess, without any one knowing me, so I will go up to the town."

"I hate to leave you alone, grandpa, but Nick must be saved, for I have resolved it, and it's no idle resolve, as you, who know me, can understand."

"If I can come back from time to time to see you I will, for it may take a long time to accomplish my purpose; but do not worry about me, for I will be all right."

"Good-by, grandpa," and with an affectionate kiss she went to the landing, got into a small skiff, and set sail for the town, her grandfather watching her departure with a feeling of deep anxiety, for he knew well the bold nature of the girl, and that she would risk everything to carry her end.

It was Nell's desire to reach Portland in the dead of night, and this she did.

She knew a fisherman, or rather a man whom she had disposed of her cargoes of fish to, and she felt that she could depend upon him, so she went direct to his anchorage and left her boat in his keeping.

She did not betray herself to him, but after giving him a golden souvenir to gain his attention, she told him that at any time she might need his large smack, with a crew on board whom she could trust, so that he must keep it in readiness for her, ready to sail at a moment's notice.

"Suppose I have an opportunity to charter the craft, lady?" he asked.

"What is your price for a week's charter?"

asked Nell, in a tone that suited her apparent age.

"I get twenty dollars, lady."

"Here is double that sum, so be sure and keep the craft, and your own pay will depend upon how you can keep a secret."

The man seemed surprised at the old lady, but said:

"You'll find me most trustworthy, lady, to my patrons."

"We shall see; now direct me to a place where I can get good quarters for myself, and which are not public."

"My daughter has a quiet house in an upper street, lady, and I will escort you there."

This he did, and soon after Nell found herself domiciled in a pleasant room.

The next day she sought the Jew's junk-shop, already referred to, and made a number of purchases of clothing, among which was a boy's suit, and others suitable to a perfect disguise for her.

Thus the days passed by, Nell running down now and then to see her grandfather, and otherwise, when in the town, plotting for the escape of Nick Burton.

Now in her disguise as a youth, then as an old woman, again as a nun, and in various other costumes, she fairly haunted the jail.

She saw Ruth Rowland enter in her nun's attire, and leave the jail after a short stay.

Again she saw Ruth and Vivian enter, and believing them to be real nuns she dared not address them for each time she was herself in a like garb with them.

The night that the pretended guard went after Nick, she stood, attired as a street urchin, near the jail gate, hidden in the wall, and heard all that had passed, and she felt then that some one else was working for the rescue of Nick, other than herself.

She followed the party to the sailors' tavern, and, after seeing the five men, released by Captain Dean, enter the tap-room, she beheld that officer and a middy walk off together.

She could not fathom the meaning of all this, but dogged their steps until she saw them part at the gate leading into the grounds of Rowland Manor.

Then she followed Donald Dean back again.

He went almost down to the water, turned, stood an instant as in thought, and then muttered:

"I had best take no more chances, so will return for him."

Back toward the jail he walked and Island Nell followed.

She saw him enter, and after a long wait come out, accompanied by Nick Burton in irons.

"Now is my chance to carry out my resolve," she muttered, at the same time drawing a pistol from her pocket.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THWARTING HIS OWN LUCK.

CAPTAIN DONALD DEAN was a man who had perfect confidence in himself.

Had he not done so, he would never have turned back, when on his way to his ship, and gone to the jail, with the intention of taking charge of Nick Burton and alone carrying him on board the Breeze.

"I have found that daring girl so determined to save Nick from the gallows, and I cannot blame her for it under the circumstances, that I dare not leave him another night in jail, as I do not know what she may do to free him."

"So I will take him on board myself."

So he said to himself, and having formed this decision he retraced his steps, as Nell saw, and rung at the jail for admission.

Michael O'Malley was on watch and admitted the young officer, upon recognizing him, yet did not think it advisable for him to attempt to take the prisoner alone.

"Oh, yes, for there can be no danger if you will handcuff him," was the reply, and the jailer soon led Nick Burton out of his cell, with manacles upon his hands and feet.

"No, jailer, take those off his ankles, for he shall not be made uncomfortable," said Captain Dean, humanely, and, with Nick's wrists only in irons, he started from the jail.

"Better let me wake one of my men, sir, to be after going with yez?" said Michael O'Malley.

"No need of it, thank you, for I will get him on board all right," was the reply, and the officer walked away with his prisoner, and started toward the harbor shore.

Nick Burton had made no remark, after leaving his cell, and, as the captain seemed disinclined to talk, the two walked on together in silence.

Soon they came to where the trees grew thick upon the pavement, and suddenly a form confronted them, and a pistol was thrust directly in the face of Donald Dean, while a low, hoarse voice cried:

"Move one inch, captain Dean, and you die!"

Captain Dean knew not fear; but he was not a fool, and to resist, as he saw at a glance, would be to throw his life away.

So he said, calmly:

"Well, my man, you have me at your mercy, so what is it?"

Before a reply could be given by the one who so suddenly had confronted him, Nick Burton turned, with the quickness of a flash, and, with his manacled hands struck up the pistol held in Donald Dean's face, and seized the assailant in a grip of iron.

"Hands off, Nick Burton, for I am here to save you," came in a loud cry, and instantly the youth released his iron grip, for the voice told him who it was that was making this desperate effort to free him.

But, quick as a flash of lightning Donald Dean had taken advantage of Nick Burton's act in his favor, and, drawing his pistol in one hand and sword in the other, he was master of the situation, while he said sternly:

"Now, sir, you are my prisoner; move and you die!"

The one he addressed did not move, for the sudden change from success to despair, seemed to have crushed Nell's bold spirit, for she it was.

As for Nick Burton he stood in utter amazement; but he knew who it was that had so boldly come to his rescue, and felt keenly how he had thwarted his own good luck by his attack upon the one who was serving him so well.

Knowing Island Nell, and seeing that Donald Dean did not, he said:

"Captain Dean, as I have saved you from losing your prisoner, and perhaps protected your life, I claim from you a favor."

"Well, Burton?"

"It is to have you release this person unquestioned, and allow him to go upon his way."

"A strange request, indeed, Burton."

"I know that it is, sir; but for my act, against myself, I would now be a free man, while, had you resisted you would have been slain, and I ask you to grant the favor I ask."

"So be it, Burton; but I warn this fellow that I will be on the lookout for any similar attack he may make against me."

"Captain Dean, you do not seem to understand that this person has acted to save me from the gallows, and not to attack you from any other motive."

"Hal! I see now why you ask his release, as he is doubtfully some friend of yours."

"He is, sir."

"Then I will let him go, and he had best lose no time in getting beyond my reach."

Without a word of thanks, Nell darted away at this and disappeared in the shadow of the trees, while Donald Dean continued on his way with his prisoner and reaching the shore hailed the Breeze.

The officer of the deck recognized his voice and sent a boat ashore after him, and soon after Nick Burton found himself on board the brig-of-war, when all hope of escape seemed wholly cut off.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE INDIAN PIRATE.

It was the day after the daring attack upon Captain Donald Dean, by Island Nell, that a vessel came flying into port, and after dropping anchor, her skipper boarded the Breeze and made a report to her commander.

That report was that she had been chased by a small, rakish schooner, fleet as the wind, with red hull, masts and spars, and sails as black as night, upon whose deck had been seen no more or less than an Indian crew.

Captain Dean told the merchant skipper that reports had come to him before of a vessel cruising along the coast with a crew of Indians, and rumor had it that they belonged to a tribe that had suffered severely at the hands of the whites, and, to avenge themselves, had taken the remnant of their people on board ship and began a warfare upon the vessels of the pale-faces.

More than this no one knew regarding them; but, they were said to be perfect seamen, and their vessel was reported as being thoroughly armed and equipped.

Of course the dwellers along the Maine coast were compelled to admit that certain tribes of Indians, friendly to the whites, had been most inhumanly treated by those whites whom they regarded as their friends.

These same Indians were said to be but a remnant of a once powerful tribe, possessing hardly more than two hundred souls, all told, and that they could raise only some three-score young warriors for battle.

They were a warlike race, large bodied, agile as panthers, brave as lions, fierce as tigers if aroused, and no better seamen were to be found along the American shores.

They had, when giving up their war against the whites, devoted themselves to fishing and hunting, and settling upon the coast, had brought smacks and other craft at the seaports, and thus learned thoroughly to be first-class sailors.

When, therefore, the merchant craft ran in, reporting that her nearness to port alone had saved her from the pursuing Indian Pirate, all

was excitement in the harbor, and Captain Donald Dean was in great distress that he was not able to go at once in pursuit of this strange foe, for the Breeze was undergoing repairs, and in no condition to put to sea.

A bright idea, however, struck him to fit out a fleet merchant schooner, arm her with guns from the brig, and with his own crew on board to set sail in search of the Indian Pirate.

This, however, would be the work of several days at least, and so he set at once to work in the good cause.

The schooner he had in view was a marvel of marine architecture, had been noted as remarkably fleet, was stanch as a line-of-battle ship, and could readily mount some ten guns and carry a crew of four-score men.

Getting into his gig he was at once rowed on board the vessel, and, after an interview with her skipper, chartered her for the Government for a cruise of thirty days, in which time he hoped to have the Breeze ready for sea.

Of course the schooner had to be pierced for her guns, and certain other improvements made, all of which Captain Dean gave a plan of, and orders for their immediate execution, the workmen to be sent on board as soon as her cargo of merchandise, for she was loading for a southern port, could be put ashore.

Having made all arrangements for the fitting out of the new craft, Captain Dean returned on board the Breeze, and having told his officers to enlist a few more good men, went on shore to search for a pilot for the intricate cruising which he must do along the coast, for the Indian Pirate was said to know all the channels thoroughly, and, though pilots could be found for different localities, it was by no means certain that he could find any one who was well acquainted with the entire coast, and this it was his desire to do.

To accomplish this, he sought out the various inns and left with the landlords a most tempting offer for any pilot who would suit his purpose, at the same time promising a reward to any one who would find him such a man.

Early the next morning the newly-chartered schooner began to unload, and by noon the workmen of the Breeze were upon her preparing her for the reception of her armament and crew.

That night, until a late hour they were kept at work, and thus two days passed away, the men working from dawn until dark, with every prospect of getting her guns on board the next day.

All the small-arms had been put on board, the magazine had been stocked, the sails and rigging had been put in perfect trim, and the next day would see her heavy guns on board.

It was after dark when the workmen left the craft, and, having seen that all was ready to receive the guns the next morning, Captain Dean departed from the schooner, leaving her only in the charge of a night watch.

It was not back to his brig that he went, for all was ready there for the transfer of a dozen of the heavy guns, but to the Rowland Manor.

Doctor Rowland was pacing to and fro on the piazza, his hands behind his back, when the young captain approached, and from within the parlors came the sound of a voice in song.

It was a pathetic ballad which she felt strangely lonely that night, Vivian Moreland and herself having given up all hope that Nick Burton could possibly be saved from an ignominious death.

The doctor greeted the young officer warmly, and was about to usher him into the parlor, when the song ceased and Ruth and Vivian came out upon the piazza, for, anxious as they were about Nick, they were constantly on the *qui vive* for news.

They greeted Captain Dean pleasantly, and Doctor Rowland was referring to the Indian Pirate excitement, when suddenly the naval officer asked quickly:

"Have you a glass near, doctor?"

Ruth handed him one which always hung upon the piazza.

Leveling it at an object that had attracted his attention, he said:

"There comes into port a vessel-of-war."

"Indeed? American of course?" said the doctor.

"She has an American look and is a small schooner that is making considerable speed out of this breeze."

"I shall have to return and see if anything important is up."

"And I will accompany you," said the doctor.

Together the two gentlemen left the mansion, while Ruth picked up the glass and turned it upon the strange vessel.

For some moments she looked at the craft in silence, and then she cried excitedly:

"Oh, Vivian! the strange vessel has run down and boarded the schooner at the anchorage, which Captain Dean is having fitted out for sea."

At the same time a man dashed quickly up to the mansion and cried out:

"Ho, there! ring your tower bell, and give the alarm, for the Indian Pirate has run into port."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

KENO, THE KENNEBEC CHIEF.

AFTER her defeat, through the act of the very one whom she sought to save, Nell seemed to be for a moment discouraged.

When given her liberty, she fled away from the spot, and then stood like a frightened deer, pondering deeply.

Suddenly she cried, aloud:

"I will do it."

With this she started for the spot where she had left her skiff, took a shore boat and rowed out to where it was at anchor, and soon after was flying down the harbor.

It was just dawn when she knocked at the door of the light-house cottage, and called to her grandfather to let her in.

The old man started when he saw her in male attire; but she gave him no time for comment, explained her defeat thus far, and then said:

"Grandpa, you know Keno, the chief of the Kennebec Indians?"

"Yes."

"He is most friendly to the whites, and they believe all that he tells them."

"Yes, Nell."

"Well, he owes me his life, and more, the life of his daughter, which I saved from the bear, as you know."

"Yes, my child."

"I intend that he shall help me free Nick."

"How can he, child?"

"Wait and see, for I start for his camp as soon as I have gotten some breakfast," was the reply.

An hour after, with her skiff stored with provisions needed for her trip, Nell set out from the light-house on her visit to the Kennebec chief.

The remnant of the once powerful tribe, under this chief, were encamped upon a small stream some dozen leagues from the light-house.

The Indians passed their time in hunting and fishing, and were friendly with the whites.

On one occasion a crew of drunken fishermen had run down the canoe of Keno with their smack and left him to drown, while with loud shouts of rude laughter they held on their course.

Nell was in her skiff a mile away and saw the act, and sailed for the spot where the Indian was struggling for life in the waters.

Just in time she reached him, for his left arm had been broken and he was about to sink, utterly exhausted.

She had dragged him into her skiff and then sailed for a small seaport, where a physician had set the Indian's broken arm, after which she had taken him to his village.

Some weeks after, while cruising along the coast, she saw an Indian girl dash down to the shore and spring into the waves, while in full chase came a black bear.

A shot from Nell's rifle killed the bear, and then the maiden took from the waters the Indian girl.

It was Wild Bird, the twelve-year-old daughter of Keno, the Kennebec chief, and thus a second time had Nell been his friend.

With these claims upon the chief, she now sought his village, having originated in her daring mind another way to rescue Nick Burton from under the shadow of the gallows.

It was a long sail, but the little skiff rested upon the water like a feather, and flew swiftly upon its way, until at sunset the hills came in sight, at whose base Nell knew the village of the Indians lay.

Shortly after dark she ran her skiff into a little cove, and soon after was trudging on her way up to the village.

No fires were visible, and this she thought was strange, for the hour was not late enough for the village to have been at rest.

At last she came to the little valley, where she had last seen the Indians encamped, and she stopped short, for not the glimmer of a single fire met her view.

Neither did the bark of a dog greet her.

There stood the wigwams of the red-skins, looking in the dim light and silence of the night, like the ghosts of a village rather than reality.

Amazed, Nell called out aloud, but no response came to her cry.

"Can the village be deserted?" she muttered.

Urged on by the knowledge that she must get aid from the Kennebec chief, or Nick Burton would have to die, she entered the red-skin hamlet.

From wigwam to wigwam she went, and at the entrance to each she called aloud.

But no voice answered her, and, after traversing the entire length of the village, she stopped to consider, for now she knew well that the place was wholly deserted.

The wigwam of the chief, as she remembered, had stood apart from the village, back upon the hillside, and within a few rods of where were buried the Indian dead.

Thither she turned her steps, hoping against hope almost, that even in that drear spot she would find some human being.

Up the valley she went, and the path she took led through the little burying-ground of the red skins.

Suddenly she halted, for before her, moving among the graves, she beheld a tall form.

Just then the morning light broke through a rift of clouds, and she gave a cry of joy, for she recognized the tall form and plumed head of Keno, the Kennebec chief.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE STORY OF A MIDNIGHT MASSACRE.

No sooner had Nell discovered the Indian chief, than, with a bound like that of a panther upon its prey, he was by her side, one hand grasping at her throat and the other with his knife upheld above her heart, while he hissed forth in English:

"Why does pale-face come to graves of my people?"

Nell was surprised and startled at the sudden act of the chief, but said calmly:

"I came here to seek the great red chief—Keno, the Kennebec."

Instantly the hand of iron that grasped her let go its grip, and the upraised knife was lowered, while the Indian said, in a tone of self-reproach:

"The Sea Flower will forgive the Kennebec chief, for in the darkness he knew her not."

"He saw in the moonlight the white skin of a pale-face, and did not look to see whether it was a brave or a squaw when he sprung upon her."

"She will forgive the chief?"

"Willingly, for I came here to see you; but why are you angry with the pale-faces?"

The chief started, and as he stood in the moonlight, Nell saw his features work convulsively.

After a moment he said:

"Has not the Sea Flower heard?"

"I have heard nothing, chief."

"Come!"

He took her arm, and moved by some deep emotion, almost dragged her to the little burying-ground.

Nell had passed there on several occasions, and now noticed that there were a number more graves there than when she had last seen the spot.

"See! Does the Sea Flower see?" asked the chief, hoarsely.

"I see many graves."

"Yes."

"They are new graves."

"Yes!" savagely said the chief; "they are the graves of my people."

"Your people?" asked Nell, in a tone of horror.

"Yes."

"Did sickness and death come among them?"

"No!" and the answer was delivered fiercely.

Nell knew not what to say, so remained silent.

At last the silence became painful, and she said:

"Have you had war with the whites?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Keno will tell the Sea Flower, if she will listen."

"I will listen."

"I was at peace with the pale-faces, I believed them my friends, though there had been open graves between us."

"But I trusted them, and when they came to me asking me to take my braves and aid them in seizing the war-canoe of a bad pale-face, promising me plenty of gold, I went as I promised."

"My braves went with me, and we sailed all night in our sail-canoes, and reached the spot where we were to meet the pale-faces."

"But they were not there."

"We waited all day, but they did not come."

"We waited all night and still they came not."

"So we set our sails and started back to our people, wondering why the pale-faces had so deceived us."

"No camp fires were burning to welcome us, and no dog barked to arouse the village."

"We reached our village, tired, wet, hungry and disappointed."

"We still saw no one to greet us."

"My foot touched something soft in my path, and bending over I found it was one of my people."

"It was an old white-haired squaw and she was dead."

"A wound was upon her throat, and her white hair was reddened with blood."

"I then saw why my people had not welcomed us."

"We rushed through the village, and everywhere we found the dead."

"They were not braves who had died with arms in their hands."

"Oh no! they were women and children."

"They were not warriors slain in battle."

"Oh, no!"

"They were poor, defenseless squaws, pap-pooes, old men and women tottering to the grave."

"We were hit a hard blow, and, men that we were, warriors who could give the war-cry, our voices went up in one long wail of woe."

"We sunk down in our tracks, and cast dust in our faces, for all were gone."

"No, not all, for after awhile a dark form came creeping toward me, and it was a squaw, one who had been wounded and left to die."

"She told us how a vessel-of-war had come to the village, the night after we left, and landing, had slain old and young alike."

"They were pale-faces, and they had sought to wipe out our people."

"Then they had pillaged our village, and returned to their ships, carrying with them my little girl, the Wild Bird, she whose life you saved."

"Now, you know why Keno hates the pale-faces: but you are welcome, and he is your friend, and he says so, even at the graves of his people, for the Sea Flower is no foe to the red-men."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE INDIAN PIRATE'S PLEDGE.

"AND has Keno made war against the pale-faces?" asked Nell, when the Kennebec chief paused in his sad story.

She had listened to the touching, fearful story of his wrongs with a heart that bled for him in sorrow, and she was moved by the recital to tears, and the chief saw the pearly drops glistening in the moonlight, and knew that he had not spoken to unsympathetic ears.

As he stood there, with the moonlight falling full upon him, he presented a fine picture of barbarous manhood.

He was tall, his shoulders were broad, and his form commanding.

His face was cast in a noble mold, though now there was a fierceness burning in his eyes that took from the native dignity of his features.

His body was bare to the waist, a skull and cross-bones in white being painted upon his broad breast, and about his neck were necklaces of eagle and bear claws.

His slender waist was encircled by a belt, in which was stuck a pair of pistols and to a chain hanging on his left side was attached a cut-lass.

He wore leggings of buckskin, fringed and beaded, moccasins incased his feet, and a coronet of gorgeously dyed eagle-feathers was upon his head.

Certainly he was a majestic looking chief, and one who showed power in every feature of his face.

For some moments a silence rested between the Indian chief and the young girl, and then Keno said:

"Would the Sea Flower know more?"

"Is there more to tell?"

"Yes."

"Then I would hear all, though it is a sad, sad story."

"The pale-faces came in a war-vessel and did this wrong."

"Their sea braves left yonder those mounds."

"They are the graves of my people."

"They bore away with them my child, the Wild Bird."

"So the Kennebec chief is their foe and he means war against them."

"I cannot blame you."

"No, for the Sea Flower has a heart."

"But I war not against those of the land, but upon those of the sea."

"In yonder inlet lies the vessel of the Kennebec chief, and on her deck are three-score sea braves with red skins, and whose kindred lie in those graves."

"I came here to-night to see again those graves that I might have no mercy in my heart."

"You have a vessel?" asked Nell in surprise.

"Oh yes."

"Where did you get it?"

"It was a small war-vessel, that ran into the little seaport one night."

"The sea braves were nearly all on shore at a pale-face pleasure-dance, and we held a war-dance ashore, took our canoes, boarded the craft and seized it."

"Captured it?"

"Yes."

"And the crew that was on board?"

"We threw them into the sea."

"And you intend to cruise in that vessel?"

"Yes."

"As what?"

"The pale-faces already call us pirates."

"Pirates?"

"Yes, see!" and the Indian pointed to the hideous skull and cross-bones painted upon his breast.

"And do you mean to be a pirate?"

"The Kennebec intends to kill the sea braves who murdered his people and stole his child."

"If he strikes those who are not the ones, he cannot help it, for the good must often suffer for the bad."

"Keno, the Kennebec chief, has spoken."

"And I thank you for your confidence in me," was Nell's reply.

Again a silence of some moments fell between them, and then it was broken by the chief with:

"But why did the Sea Flower come here?"

"To seek the Kennebec chief."

"Does she wish aught done that Keno can do for her?"

"Yes."

"He is her friend."

"I know that, and that is why I came."

"Let the Sea Flower speak."

"I have a friend, one who is as dear to me, as are the graves there of your people dear to you."

"Let the Sea Flower speak."

"They say that he, my friend, is a pirate."

"So is the Kennebec."

"Yes, but you are free, and the one I love is in prison."

"Keno will help the Sea Flower."

"First hear me."

"The ears of the Keno are open."

"The one I love is a good pale-face; he speaks well of the Kennebec red people, and he is brave, and noble."

"He lived with his mother at the great light on the little island, and—"

"The Sea Flower speaks of the young white sea brave at the light-house?"

"Yes."

"He has done much for my people, and we all love him and his mother."

"I am glad to hear you speak so of Nick Burton for he is under sentence of death."

"To die?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Ere many suns have passed."

"His pale-face brothers say so?"

"Yes."

"Because he is a pirate?"

"They say that he was, but it is not true, for he was no pirate."

"Where is he?"

"In the great town?"

"In the strong house?"

"No, he was in jail, but they took him out and put him on board a vessel for safe-keeping."

"The Keno will sail in and take him off."

"No, for those on the war-vessel are my friends, and I would not see harm befall them."

"Well, what would the Sea Flower have me do?"

"I have a plan to rescue the young man."

"The ears of the Kennebec are open."

"It can be done without loss of life."

"Why not kill?"

"No, no, I would not harm my own people even to save Nick Burton."

"Well, the Sea Flower has but to speak."

"I will tell you my plan, and if the Kennebec will aid me all will go well."

"The Kennebec pledges himself to do as the Sea Flower says," was the earnest reply.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RED-SKINS' WAR-CRAFT.

"LET the Sea Flower come with the Kennebec," said the Indian Pirate, and he led the way from the little burying-ground of his people, down the valley toward the shore.

Nell had her boat hidden away in the inlet, and went for it, while Keno took a canoe, in which he had come ashore.

They met alongside of the Indian Pirate's schooner, then coming out in the darkness, as terse and seamanlike as from a man-of-war.

"Ahoy those boats!"

"Rest on your oars, or we fire into you!"

"Kennebec!" called back the chief, and then came the response:

"Ay, ay, chief."

"My men don't sleep," said Keno, with admiration in his tone, addressing Nell, as they drew near the schooner.

"No, and it is well that they do not."

Over the side they went, the chief, with a gallantry not to be expected from an Indian, offering his hand to the maiden.

It was a strange sight, that vessel-of-war, with her crew of Indians on deck, and everything in perfect order and under thorough discipline.

The red-skin sailors were dressed in buckskin leggings, were bare to the waist, though many of them had blankets of a fiery red hue about them, and about their heads were bound red bands, the ends tied behind and falling down their backs as far as did their long black hair.

In their belts were pistols and a knife each, and upon the breast of each was painted in white the skull and cross-bones.

At a glance, as it lay in the full light of the moon, Nell recognized the vessel as an armed cutter that she had often seen in those waters.

She carried a pivot-gun, a thirty-two, fore and aft, and four twelve-pounders as broad-side batteries, while along the bulwarks were

muskets, boarding-pikes, pistols and cutlasses, ready for use.

Leading the way to the cabin, Keno said:

"My braves are sailors," and he pointed to the neatly-furled sails, the white decks, coiled ropes, and that everything was ship-shape.

"Yes, you have a fine little crew, and, Indians though you are, you are well known as the best sailors along the coast," answered Nell.

The cabin presented the same appearance of neatness as did the deck.

A lamp burned over the table, and the quarters were comfortable and well furnished.

Not a thing seemed to have been disturbed, since the schooner had been captured, which showed that the Kennebec chief had not seized the vessel to rob her, but to use her as a means of gaining his revenge against those who had so cruelly wronged him.

Nell sunk down into a seat and gazed about her with deep interest.

The chief also seated himself, and his appearance was certainly terrifying, as the lamp's light fell full upon him.

Upon either temple Nell noticed that the locks were turning gray, and this she knew had not been the case when she had last seen him a month before, for then his hair had been of ebony hue.

But the gray intermingling with the jet-black, in a few short weeks, showed how deeply the iron had entered into his soul.

"Well, you certainly have a good vessel," said Nell, admiringly.

"And a good crew, if they are red sea braves."

"Yes, they are a splendid set of seamen, and you will no doubt spread terror along the coast."

"I have already begun to do that," was the grim reply.

"I am sorry that it is so, and yet I cannot blame you for seeking revenge upon those who have killed your people."

"My people shall be avenged, and for every one who died, a score of scalps shall be taken from pale-face heads," was the savage response.

A moment after he pointed to a dark object hanging upon the wall.

"See!" he said fiercely. "That is my string of scalps, and I have only begun the work."

"There are a score there, but ah! how long will be that string of red trophies, before I have hauled down my flag."

"How bitter will be the wails of the pale-faces, and how terrible the name of Keno, the Indian Pirate, along this coast."

Nell saw that the chief was growing almost violent, in his anger, and wishing to change the subject, she said:

"And you have a flag then?"

Keno made no reply, but walking to a locker took out a roll of bunting.

It was a black field, and in its center was an Indian standing in a white boat grasping a knife in one hand and waving a scalplock in the other.

"See Indian Pirate's flag?" he said quietly, unrolling it, and Nell shuddered as she gazed at it, and she saw that it was evidently the work of Indian hands, perhaps made by the chief himself, for the figures were bead and quill-work upon the black bunting, and really most artistically done.

"But the Sea Flower has something to tell the Kennebec," said the chief, tossing the flag aside, and again seating himself.

"Yes, I wish to tell you of my plot to rescue Nick Burton, and there is no time to lose."

"Listen, and you will know what it is," answered Island Nell, and the Indian Pirate became all attention.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NELL'S PLOT.

"You know," began Island Nell, "that Nick Burton is kept as a prisoner on board the brig-of-war Breeze?"

"Yes."

"He is below decks, in irons, and it would be impossible to rescue him by force."

"Might try."

"No, for it would do no good, and your braves would be slaughtered without mercy."

"Men must die."

"Not foolishly, and foolish it would be indeed to attempt to attack the brig, for, though she is crippled, she yet has her guns, and over a hundred men on board, while hundreds more would come to her aid from the merchant vessels in the harbor, the police guard-boats and others."

"We must use cunning."

"Yes."

"We must outwit the guards."

"The Sea Flower has an old head."

"Now my plan is to go on board the brig, disguised as a country lad, and report that the Indian Pirate is lying in a part of the bay, in a secluded inlet, undergoing repairs, and that if the brig went down, even if she had to rig up temporarily she could capture the red-skin outlaws."

It was evident that the Kennebec did not catch the plan of Nell exactly, and he looked surprised.

So Nell continued:

"I had formed a different plan before I saw you, but now that I know you have a vessel at your command, I think this other plot the best."

"But let me explain it more fully."

"Yes."

"I will return to-night to town, rig up in my disguise, and board the brig with my report of the pirate Indians being in their vessel, as I said, hiding away among the Hen and Chickens Islands."

"You know that there are but two persons on the coast who can pilot a vessel through those islands, unless some of your men can do it, or yourself."

"No, my braves don't know those waters well, and I can go through only in a canoe."

"Well, I can pilot a vessel through, and Nick Burton is the only other one that can."

"I will tell Captain Dean that you are hiding there, and when he asks for a pilot, will say that I have heard that Nick Burton, the Light-house Boy, was the only one that can run his vessel there, and, pretending not to know that Nick is in jail, will suggest that he run down to the light-house to get him."

"This will cause Captain Dean to ask Nick to act as pilot for him, and perhaps he will promise to try and get him a pardon if he is successful; but I know that no pirate can get a pardon, so Nick will have to die."

"But I will manage to get a letter to him some way, for Nick would otherwise refuse to act as pilot as he is a prisoner."

"Now, in my letter I will tell him to run the brig down into the Hen and Chickens waters, arriving there at night."

"He will, of course, be allowed to go without his irons while acting as pilot, and there is one place where he has to round a sharp rock, and it is a most dangerous thing to do."

"As he does this, I will tell him in my letter to jump overboard, and I will spring to the helm and take his place, so that no harm will come to the vessel."

"Why no harm?"

"Because Captain Dean is a noble man, he has a gallant crew, and I would not see harm befall them, even to save Nick's life."

"Yes."

"I will then pilot the vessel through the islands, and run her back to Portland, while Nick can swim to the island near where he jumped overboard, and where I wish you to have a boat and a couple of braves awaiting him, for, after being in irons so long, he will not be able to row or paddle."

"Yes, my braves shall be there."

"And you, in your schooner, can wait five leagues away, at the Monument Island, and Nick can join you there and thus escape."

"Yes."

"Will the Kennebec do this for me?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then it is arranged, and I will pilot the Kennebec now to a safe haven, near the light-house, where he can wait news from me as to just when the brig will sail, so that he can get the two braves on the island among the Hen and Chickens group, and run with his schooner to hide in Monument Island."

"Yes."

Thus was it arranged, and, having drawn Nell's light skiff on board the schooner, the

vessel set sail for the secret retreat which the maiden had referred to.

The little haven, nestled away in an island, where the high, pine-clad rocks hid the masts from sight, was reached without adventure, and leaving in her skiff, Island Nell arrived in the town early in the forenoon, and at once sought the junk-shop of Belshazzar the Jew.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE INDIAN PIRATE ENTERS PORT.

WHEN Island Nell returned to Portland, she made an important discovery.

This was that the news of the Indian Pirate's work at sea was already known in the town, and a number of vessels had come in bearing tidings of the deeds of the daring red rover.

Coasting craft were afraid to put to sea, and others had run into the harbor as a place of refuge, fearing to meet the dread outlaws of the deep.

Nell also discovered that all eyes were turned upon the good work that Captain Dean was engaged upon which was the fitting out of the schooner for sea, as the Breeze could not be gotten ready under a week's time, or more.

With this knowledge she at once communicated with the Indian pirate, in his safe island retreat.

Should the schooner run out, she feared, on account of its light draught of water, it might be able to follow the Indian Pirate's vessel anywhere in those waters, a thing which the brig could not do, as she drew too much water to run the gantlet of many of the island channels.

The schooner was very fast too, in a light breeze, as well as in a blow, and, with a very heavy armament, taken from the Breeze, and a larger crew than did the Indian Pirate have, should the two vessels come together, the result would be disastrous to the red-skins, and through them to the hopes of Nick Burton.

Weighing well all these considerations, Nell at once sailed for the island where lay hidden the Indian Pirate.

To the Kennebec she told her hopes and fears, and just when the schooner was to sail, adding:

"Two good pilots have been engaged, and are now on the schooner."

"True, they are not as good as either Nick Burton or myself, for they only know the outer channels, while we know all; but they know these waters well enough to be dangerous, and I have an idea that we can thwart them."

"Yes."

"They are in the schooner, awaiting to run out in her."

"Yes," was the laconic reply of the Indian Pirate, which was always delivered in a way that served as a question to know more.

"The schooner is also more dangerous than the brig, being smaller, of lighter draught, and she is fully as fast."

"Yes."

"She is faster than your vessel, is a hard-weather, as well as a light-weather craft, which yours is not, for you do not wish to go far off the coast in your vessel."

"No."

"Then she is well equipped, excepting her heavy guns, which are to be put on board tomorrow."

"Yes."

"You are short of provisions, you say?"

"Yes, must eat, if we are red-skins."

"True; so I think it would be a good idea to run in to-night, after dark, throw a crew on board the schooner, cut her cables, and run her out with you."

"Yes."

"There are seven men on board, including the two pilots; but for my sake, I wish you to spare them, for I wish no bloodshed."

"You can keep them prisoners, so that the brig cannot get their services, should she set sail, after the capture of the schooner."

"Yes."

"Then they can be put in a boat and set free."

"I will do as the Sea Flower tells."

"Well, you will get a far better craft than this, and you can run to the Monument Island, and transfer your guns from this schooner to the other, and keep this one in

hiding there for future use, if you should need another vessel."

"The Sea Flower is cunning."

"You will have a better battery for the other schooner than for this craft, as these guns are too heavy for this craft."

"Yes, the Sea Flower talks good sense."

"Now, what do you think?"

"I will do as the Sea Flower says."

"Thank you."

"But the Light-House Boy?"

"He will, of course, remain a prisoner on the brig, which will be fitted out in all haste to pursue you, and he will go as pilot, as we had at first arranged, and thus make his escape."

"Yes."

Having thus arranged her plot, Nell left the schooner, sailed to Light-house Rock, and after a short stay with her grandfather, who missed her sadly, she started on her way to Portland, arriving shortly after dark.

With her disguise as an old woman once more resumed, she walked out and took a commanding position on the hillside, not far from the Rowland Manor, to witness the carrying out of her plans.

Of course she knew it was wrong for her to aid in the cutting out of the schooner, which Donald Dean was fitting out.

But then she had stipulated that there should be no bloodshed, and she had made up her mind to save Nick Burton at every cost, so she quieted her conscience on the basis that she was doing her duty toward one she loved, even at a sacrifice of her duty to her country.

Arriving at the hill-top, upon which several young couples were gathered gazing at the beautiful scene of town and harbor by night, with the hundreds of sparkling lights spread out before them, she took a commanding position to wait, while she turned her eyes seaward.

As she did so she uttered a slight cry of commingled joy and surprise, for there, running swiftly into the harbor, she saw the schooner of the Indian Pirate.

The Kennebec was true to his pledge.

CHAPTER XL.

THE CAPTURE.

THERE were on the schooner, which Captain Dean was fitting out, seven men, as Island Nell had said.

Two of these were half-fishermen, half-pilots, who had been engaged to run the craft along the coast in her hunt for the red-skin outlaws.

The other five were the night watch, consisting of a coxswain and four men.

They had finished their evening meal, two of the watch had turned in until their time to go on duty arrived, and the other two were on watch on deck.

The coxswain and the two pilots were chatting together in the steerage, and there was no idea whatever in their minds of danger visiting the schooner.

Suddenly the call of one of the men on watch came down the hatch:

"Coxswain, there is a schooner-of-war coming up the harbor."

Up on deck went the coxswain and the two pilots, and their eyes fell upon a small armed schooner, for a seaman's practiced eye knows an armed vessel at a glance.

She was not very far distant, and her course would bring her near the schooner at anchor.

"She's a cutter," said the coxswain.

"She's the Kennebec cruiser, I think," remarked one of the pilots.

"No, it can't be the Kennebec cruiser, for you know word came that she had been seized by the Indian Pirate," responded the other.

"That is so, but she looks it, and maybe she has been recaptured."

"We shall soon know."

"She comes on well."

"She's going to anchor near us, I guess." Such were the comments upon the schooner, as the little craft came on.

Then it was seen that her coming seemed to create a commotion among the vessels as she passed, and a moment after the loud note of alarm rung out from the deep-toned bell in the tower of the Rowland Manor.

This was taken up by the town bell, then the church steeples shook with the vibrations of the heavy tocsins sounding within them,

a rocket went up from the deck of the brig-of-war Breeze, and was answered by three from the fort.

In an instant almost the alarm had spread and the town seemed wild with excitement.

And the cause of all this commotion?

Quietly held on her way, luffed up, when near the schooner, as though about to come to anchor, and then skillfully laid herself alongside of the vessel on which stood the amazed crew.

Ere they could understand just what had happened the coxswain, his men and the pilots were seized without bloodshed, nimble forms flew about the deck, the cable was slipped, the sails were set and the captured schooner left her anchorage in less than three minutes from the time that the pirates had boarded her.

As she shot ahead, the two schooners parted, and both, under full sail, and with a rising breeze went flying down the harbor.

Then the deep boom of the guns at the fort were heard, and flying shot went after the escaping vessels.

But, as if in defiance, a blue light was suddenly lighted upon the deck of each, and the sight was electrifying to those who saw what was revealed, for upon the decks of both schooners were visible the half-naked forms of an Indian crew, and no white person was visible among them.

"The Indian Pirate! the Indian Pirate!"

It certainly was a most alarming sight, to see the very vessel, which the schooner was fitting out to go in search of, run into the crowded harbor and cut out her enemy at her anchorage.

It was known too that the Breeze was in no condition to meet the pirate, and, for a few moments, many citizens feared that the town was to be attacked.

But soon they saw that the Indian Pirate had entered port for a certain purpose and accomplishing it, was leaving with all haste.

The fort kept up a hot fire upon the flying vessels, but did them no apparent harm, and the Breeze was warped around and sent broadsides down the harbor, yet with a like harmless result, for the nimble schooner soon ran out of range, the captured vessel gallantly leading and gaining upon the pirate, which proved she was the fleetest of the two vessels.

"So far, good!"

"Now to carry the next act out with success."

"The Kennebec has been true, for he did not return the fire of the fort and brig, and I believe took no life when boarding the schooner."

So muttered Island Nell to herself as she slowly walked down the hill to her lodging-place.

CHAPTER XLI.

A BEARER OF NEWS.

CAPTAIN DONALD DEAN was terribly cut at having to lose his schooner.

To have the very craft he was going out to capture, run into the harbor, and, under his very guns cut out the vessel he intended to sail in, was something that cut him to the heart's quick.

Arriving at the shore, when he left Rowland Manor, he sprang into a shore boat, accompanied by Doctor Rowland, and sculled swiftly out to his brig.

As he reached the vessel's side, he beheld the Indian Pirate and her prize already under sail down the harbor.

His lieutenant had thrown some men into the boats, to go to the rescue, but they were too late for the nimble red-skins.

"The forts will never stop them!" cried Donald Dean as he heard the roar of the heavy guns, and then, as an idea struck him he called out:

"In the boats there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Take lines and haul the brig's stern around, so as to put her broadside down the harbor!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Ho, lads, man your broadside guns, take good aim, and, as the brig gets well round, let those schooners have it, if you knock them out of the water!"

A cheer broke from the crew at this order, and, so quickly did the men in the boats, and those at the guns do their work, that the battery was playing upon the flying schooner

ers a couple of minutes after the command to do so came from the lips of Donald Dean.

But the escaping vessels were now a long way off, and their flight, to the chagrin of all was not checked, and they disappeared from sight half an hour after.

But the ire of Donald Dean was aroused, and he called to his crew to divide into three watches, trim blue lights, and set to work upon the brig and keep at it day and night until she was all ready for sea.

He also sent on shore for ship-carpenters to come right off, and gave the purser orders to go at dawn and secure all stores and extra arms that would be needed for their cruise.

He had made up his mind to accomplish two things, before he again put into port, and they were to hunt down Burke the Buccaneer and the Indian Pirate, for his harbor had been invaded, and his honor was at stake, and he swore to give himself no rest until these red rovers had been swept off the face of the blue waters.

By dint of arduous work, without a moment's cessation, for gangs of workmen relieved each other every four hours, the Breeze was rapidly nearing readiness for sea, and on the second day following the visit of the Indian Pirate into port, Donald Dean was standing upon his deck watching the good work go rapidly on, when a small sail-boat was seen coming up the harbor.

The wind was fresh, and the boat had but a single occupant; but he managed it with consummate skill, and soon after he luffed up sharp and ran alongside the brig before the officer of the deck had any idea he intended doing otherwise than going by.

"Well, sir, that is a bold way to board one of Uncle Sam's cruisers," called out Donald Dean sternly, as the occupant of the boat sprang upon deck and walked aft.

The visitor was a character, to judge by his appearance.

He wore an ill-fitting sailor suit, a slouch hat with the brim falling over his ears and forehead, and from beneath it a mass of unevenly cut red hair was visible.

His jacket sleeves were long, hanging over his hands and concealing them, and a pair of rough cowhide boots covered his feet.

His face was a study, burned brown, freckled and with a devil-me-care look that was really attractive.

He was a youth, perhaps fifteen, and maybe twenty years of age.

"Is you ther skipper?" he asked, with no idea of the dignity of an American naval captain.

"I am."

"Be this your craft?"

"Yes."

"She's upsot."

"How do you mean?"

"Is you buildin' her?"

Donald Dean could appreciate a good character when he met one, and was pleased with the one he now beheld, so was willing to urge him on.

"No, not exactly, but getting her ready for sea."

"Powers! but you must be in a hurry to smell salt water."

"I am."

"Be you goin' arter anything?"

"Yes."

"What, maybe?"

"A pirate."

"Hookey! you don't mean it?"

"I do."

"Waal, you is my persimmon."

"Your what?"

"You is the skipper I am looking for."

"Well, I am glad you have found me."

"So be I."

"Have you anything to communicate?"

"Hain't got nothin' but thet old boat, an' she hain't wuth much."

"You do not understand me."

"More'n likely, stranger."

"I mean, did you come on board this vessel for any purpose?"

"I just did."

"Well, what was it?"

"To see ther skipper."

"I am the skipper."

"So yer told me."

"And this is the brig-of-war Breeze."

"I want ter know."

"It is."

"Waal, I hev come ter tell yer suthin'."

"Well, out with it."

"Does yer want ter catch a pirit?"

"Indeed I do."

"Has yer heerd tell on ther Injun Pirit?"

"Yes. What do you know of him?"

"Heaps. Yer see, he lived in a village, and were as peace'ble as a snake in winter, with ther pale-faces: but one night thar come to his camp a lot o' men in boats, and told him they wanted him to take his warriors and jist help 'em to rope in a pirit."

"So the durned red Injun fools went whar they was told ter, and while they was away, them as told 'em went ter thar village and kilt ther wimmins and papposes, and old Kennebec found 'em thar when he comed back."

"I heard rumors of this, but did not believe it, as no American seamen would be guilty of such an act," indignantly said Donald Dean.

"They wasn't Yankees as did it. They war pirts. I seen 'em for I were up in ther hills, fer I lives with my ma not many leagues from the Injun camp."

"Indeed?"

"I does, skipper, and I hain't tellin' you no lie."

"I believe you, my lad."

"Well, skipper, them as kilt ther Injuns was pirts, and they was known as Burke ther Buccaneer and his schooner's folks."

"Ah!"

"Yas, and they come thar fer gold which were right under ther wigwams of ther Injuns."

"When they massacred ther red-skins, they dug up ther gold and lit out, and then it were ther old Kennebec come back, capter'd ther cutter and took ter piritin' hisself."

"Poor fellow, he is to be pitied; but still, as he has raised the black flag and turned pirate, he must be captured and punished."

"It were ter do jist that that I come arter yer, skipper," was the low reply of the strange lad, and he gave Donald Dean a knowing wink that showed he knew more than he had thus far made known.

CHAPTER XLII.

COASTER TOM.

"WHAT is your name, my lad?" asked Donald Dean, regarding the youth attentively as he stood before him.

"Folks to home calls me Coaster Tom, for you see I is often running the coast with letters for the folks, and hit's they sends me ter buy in ther towns."

"Oh! I see."

"Yas, but my name is Thomas Doolittle. That's what I were christened by Parson Slimmens, and I guesses as how it holds good."

"Certainly, Tom; but now tell me all you know about this Indian Pirate's hiding-place, and I will give you more gold than you can make in carrying letters and making purchases in a year's time."

"Git out, skipper."

"I mean it, so tell me just where the Indian Pirate is."

"Does yer know them islands they calls the Hen and Chickens?"

"Yes, I have heard of them."

"Well, he is thar."

"That is a dangerous cruising-ground. When did he go there?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"One vessel?"

"No, thar was two of 'em, both skunners, and one a leetle larger than t'other."

"You saw them run in?"

"Yas, skipper, and heerd ther pirit skipper say as how he was goin' ter swap his guns from one skunner ter t'other, and lay off thar fer some days."

"Ha! you heerd this?" cried Captain Dean, springing to his feet.

"I guess I did, skipper."

"This was yesterday?"

"Yas, skipper."

"Well, I am moving everything to get the brig ready for sea, but it will be to-morrow morning before I can sail."

"I guess yer'll be in plenty of time."

"But how about a pilot? Cannot you pilot the brig?"

"I knows the waters a trifle, skipper; but it is different foolin' 'round among rocks with a leetle smack from what it is with a big craft, for more'n likely ther keel o' the big one will find a rock underneath you hain't looking fer."

"That is very true, my lad; but, do you not know of some one who could act as pilot?"

"No, I doesn't know of more'n one other than Kennebec, the Injun Pirit, and he knows 'em well."

"And who is that one?"

"He keeps ther Rock Light-house, down ther coast."

"Ah! you mean Nicholas Burton."

"I knows him as Nick."

"He knows those waters, does he?"

"Yas; I hev seen him cruising about 'em often, and with a pretty fair-sized craft for one to handle."

"And he is the only one you know of?"

"Yas."

"I will give you five hundred dollars if you will act as pilot for the brig, for I believe you can do it."

Coaster Tom shook his head, and then asked:

"Why don't you get Nick, the Light-house Boy?"

"Don't you know that he has gotten himself into trouble?"

"I doesn't."

"Well, he is in irons as a pirate."

"It's a lie, skipper, fer Nick hain't no bloody pirit," indignantly said Coaster Tom.

"He was caught leading Burke, the Buccaneer, to rob the home of a wealthy citizen of this town; he was tried for piracy, found guilty, and he is now on this brig, in irons, awaiting the day of his execution, for he is to be hung at the yard-arm."

"Oh, Lordy! who'd have thought it o' Nick."

"But, skipper, he are ther one ter pilot yer brig thar, and ther only one, and ef yer asks him I guesses he'd do it."

"I hate to ask a favor of a man with a rope about his neck," said Donald Dean thoughtfully.

"Waal, ef he are guilty o' bein' a pirit, as you says he is, but which I doesn't b'lieve, he'd oughter be willin' ter do a good turn afore he is hanged, and I'd ask him."

"Will you ask him?"

"Yas, I don't mind; but it'll make me cry a most ter see Nick in irons."

"Well, go below and see what he says, and, if you can persuade him I will pay you liberally."

"I'll do it, skipper."

"Midshipman Rowell, show this lad below and let him have an interview with the prisoner," called out Captain Dean, addressing a middy, who replied promptly in a loud tone:

"Ay, ay, sir," and then led Coaster Tom below.

On reaching the guard-room the middy said aloud:

"Sir Pirate, of the deep blue sea, here is a friend, who seeks an interview with your piratical majesty."

"Guard, Captain Dean's orders, and you are to keep within ear-shot," he said to the marine on duty, speaking in a low tone.

It was not very light in the guard-room where Nick was kept in prison, and coming in from the light, Coaster Tom did not seem to see him at first very distinctly.

But Nick saw the youth, his eyes being accustomed to the dim light, and looked at him fixedly.

The young prisoner was pale but calm, and sat on a stool, his manacled hands resting upon his knees.

Just outside the state-room paced the guard whose duty it was to keep watch upon the prisoner.

"Waal, Nick, I is glad to see yer, tho' it don't look nat'ral ter see yer here, and hear 'em call yer a bloody pirit."

"But I doesn't believe 'em when they says so, and I told ther skipper I didn't too; so give me yer hand, Nick, and shake for old friendship's sake," and Coaster Tom warmly grasped the hand of the condemned youth, holding on to it with both his own, and in a way that brought the blood into Nick Burton's face with a rush that made him grow dizzy, as from some deep emotion.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOPE.

"YER hain't forgot me, has yer, Nick?"

"I is Coaster Tom o' ther Kennebec," said Coaster Tom, as he wrung the hand of Nick Burton.

"Oh no, I have not forgotten you."

"I know you well, Coaster Tom," was the answer of Nick Burton.

"I thought yer hadn't forgot an old friend, and I come to have a chat with yer."

"I am glad to see you, Tom, though you find me in a bad fix."

"Durned ef I don't, and I doesn't believe what they says of you."

"I thank you for that trust in me," calmly said Nick.

"You needn't thank me; but, Nick, if they hasn't treated you just right, hain't you willing to do a leetle act of good for 'em?"

"For whom?"

"The skipper, yes, and the great country, o' Yankeeland?"

"Of course, if it was in my power to serve either Captain Dean or my country, I would gladly do so. But how can I, a prisoner in irons, and condemned to death, soon to die upon the yard-arm, do aught for any one?" bitterly said Nick.

"You kin do heaps, Nick."

"Pray tell me how?"

"You knows the Hen and Chickens?"

Nick smiled and asked:

"Well, Tom, what of the Hen and Chickens?"

"Could you pilot a craft through them waters?"

"Easily. But, Tom, what is it you want a pilot for?"

"To run the brig down the coast and in among the Hen and Chickens."

"For what purpose?"

"To capture a pirit."

"Is one there?"

"Yas, and I told ther skipper o' this craft, jist all about it, and he wants ter take ther pirit, only he hain't got no pilot."

"Why do you not serve as such?"

"It hain't in me ter do it, so I jist up and told him thet I'd chat with you, and I guess-ed as how you'd do it."

"I will do anything I can to serve Captain Dean, for I feel that in my case he has done no more than his duty."

"Maybe you kin drive a barg'in with him."

"How do you mean?"

"I meant fer yer ter dicker with him for your life."

"Ah!"

"Now yer hits my meaning, Nick?"

"Yes, but Captain Dean has no power to pardon me, and Government will not do it."

"Waal, yer'll be ther brig's pilot?"

"Yes."

"All right, Nick; I'll tell ther skipper so and I'm guessin' thet things will work round right."

"I hope so, Tom."

"Waal, Nick, good-by; but I guesses I'll see yer again, fer I intends ter ask ther skipper ter take my leetle boat in tow, and let me ride along with him when he goes, bein' as my home hain't far away from ther Hen and Chickens, and besides, I wants ter see ther pirit tuk."

"What pirate is it?" quickly asked Nick.

"The Kennebec Injun pirit."

"Ah, I was in hopes that it was Burke, the Buccaneer," sadly said Nick, as he grasped Coaster Tom's hand in farewell.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A LETTER OF INSTRUCTION.

CAPTAIN DONALD DEAN was awaiting the return of the youth with considerable anxiety.

He saw an opportunity of capturing the Indian Pirate, if he could secure a pilot, and yet if Nick refused, he would be unable to do so.

He had, however, hope that Nick Burton would act as pilot, in spite of the doom hanging over him, and so he urged the crew on to greater exertions in completing the work upon the brig.

The foremast was already in place, and the stays and spars were being rigged as fast as hands could work.

"I can sail to-morrow night, sure, if that youth will act as pilot," he muttered, as he saw the middy and Coaster Tom approaching him.

"Well, sir, what is the result of your visit to the prisoner?" he asked.

"All right, skipper; Nick will go."

"Good! then we sail to-morrow night."

"You have done well, my lad."

"I hain't done nothin' to brag on."

"You have helped me out of a scrape, and put me in the way of capturing a pirate, and

if you will come into the cabin with me, I'll pay you well."

"See here, skipper, I don't mind lookin' inter yer cabin, ter see what kind o' box yer has got ter live in; but I is a American, clean cut from keel to truck, and I don't take no gold fer doing my duty."

"Well said, my lad; but I know not how to repay you."

"Give me a share o' ther pirit prize-money when you has taken her, and let me go along with yer, if yer kin find room on board fer my leetle craft."

"I will gladly take you, my lad; but as for your craft, go ashore and sell it for all you can get for it, and upon your return with me, after the capture of the pirate, I'll make you a present of as pretty a fishing-smack as floats in these waters."

"Skipper, you is a man clean through; but let me tell yer that Nick says he'll sarve yer, pilot yer to ther Hen and Chickens Islands, and won't ask yer fer his life in return, though I told him ter dicker with yer fer it."

"Nick Burton is a gallant fellow, Coaster Tom, and I will do all in my power for him, and certainly shall give him a respite for a few days longer."

"Now go ashore and sell that tub of yours, and return at dark."

"I has kinsfolk in ther town, skipper, so guess I'll drop in on them fer my pork and beans until I come on board ter-morrer night ter sail with yer."

"As you please, my lad; but I shall sail shortly after nightfall, so don't miss coming, for my idea is that you will make a first-class sailor, and one day may be an officer."

"Git out," said Coaster Tom in his sly, peculiar way, and he went over the side into his boat.

Having seen that all was going well, Donald Dean decided to take a run on shore, but determined to first have an interview with Nick Burton.

Going down below he called to the guard to walk aside, and said:

"Well, Burton, your young friend has told me that you are willing to serve as my pilot on a run among the islands?"

"I told him that I would, sir."

"Did he explain to you where we were going?"

"Among the Hen and Chickens, sir."

"Yes; but did he tell you why?"

"Yes, sir, he said that you were going in pursuit of the Indian Pirate."

"I am, for that strange young friend of yours, Coaster Tom, comes to me with most important news, and which, I frankly admit, would be of no service to me, but for your aid."

"I thank you, Burton, and I will not forget your goodness in this matter."

Nick Burton made no reply, and after a moment's silence, Donald Dean said:

"After we sail to-morrow night, Burton, I will allow you to come on deck, and will have your irons taken off."

"I thank you, sir."

With a word of farewell Donald Dean now left, and Nick Burton was again alone.

Rising, he went to the little port-hole and looked out.

The guard heard the clanking of his chains and glanced within, but seeing his attitude, standing with his face in the open port, as though for air, he went on with his monotonous walk to and fro outside the guard-room door.

Then Nick Burton unclasped his hand, and it revealed a piece of paper which he had held crumpled there from the moment of his meeting with Coaster Tom.

Spreading the little bit of paper cautiously out he read:

"Nick:—I have brought a message to the captain, of the Indian Pirate being among the Hen and Chickens Islands, and will let him know that you are the only one who can pilot him there."

"In rounding the Hen rock, jump overboard, and I will take the helm, and you know I can safely take the brig through."

"Manage to reach the islands at night, and swim to the left shore, and upon the island you will find a boat and two men awaiting you, and they will look to your safety."

"Once free you can prove your innocence of crime, and find out what has become of your mother, a duty you certainly owe her."

"More I cannot now say; but, if I find no opportunity to speak with you again, remember to spring over the stern of the brig into the sea, as soon as you have rounded the big rock, and I will be at your side to take the helm. Success attend you, and do not forget."

NELL."

Several times Nick Burton read this letter, and then he thrust it into an inner pocket of his jacket, while he said:

"God bless that noble girl!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TWO PROMISES.

WHEN Captain Donald Dean went on shore he wended his steps to the Rowland Manor.

He wished to say farewell to its inmates, for he knew that he would not have another opportunity to call, as he would sail after sunset the following evening.

He wended his way up the street in the gathering twilight, and, after a brisk walk, reached the little gate leading into the beautiful grounds surrounding the mansion.

It was the spot where he last parted with Ruth, when he had seen her home, after her being so cleverly caught in attempting the rescue of Nick Burton.

He entered the grounds, and found Ruth alone upon the piazza.

She greeted him in a kindly way, and then told him that her father and Vivian had gone for a row upon the river, but would soon return.

He took a seat by her side, and said softly:

"Ruth, I have something to say to you."

"I am all attention, Captain Dean."

"I leave port to-morrow night."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"I did not know that your vessel was ready to sail."

"Nor would she have been but for news I received to-day, which caused me to hasten the men still more in their work."

"May I know the news?"

He told her of the visit of queer Coaster Tom and its result.

"And you have asked this man, Nick Burton, with a rope about his neck, to be your pilot?" she said, with something of scorn in her tones.

"Yes."

"Have you thought that he might run your vessel upon a rock and wreck her?"

"Yes, I had thought of that."

"Yet trust him?"

"I do."

"Did you promise to spare his life?"

"It is not in my power to do so."

"And you cannot reward him for his services?"

"Only in one way."

"And that way?"

"To petition the Government to spare his life."

"Will the Government do it?"

"If we capture the pirate through the act of Nick Burton, I feel that it will."

"And you will try to have his life saved?"

"I have already respited him for some little time."

"I thank you for this, Captain Dean."

"I shall do my utmost to get him pardoned."

"And if the pardon is refused?"

"Have you forgotten the terms you offered me to free Nick Burton, Ruth?"

"I have not."

"Do you still make and offer the same terms?"

"I do," she said in a low voice.

"Well, I have just this to say: that if Nick Burton pilots my vessel in safety on this cruise, and the Government refuses his pardon, then, with the knowledge of how he has done his duty by me, and the belief which I have that he is really guiltless after all, and also with the incentive of the terms you offer me to soothe my conscience for the act, I will connive at his escape, for I will not give the order to put that noble fellow, if he so proves himself, to death at the yard-arm."

Ruth was visibly affected by his words, and held forth her hand, while she said as she grasped his warmly:

"Captain Dean, I honor you for those words; and here I tell you once more, if you save Nicholas Burton from an ignominious death I will become your wife, if you still wish that I shall be such."

"Heaven knows that I do," he said, earnestly.

Then Ruth continued:

"I must beg of you that you say nothing to my father of this, for, from some unac-

countable reason he is prejudiced against Nick Burton, and, if I wrong him may Heaven forgive me, but I really believe that he wishes to have him hanged— Oh! there they come now."

Up the avenue walk came Doctor Rowland and Vivian, and coming upon the piazza they greeted the young captain warmly, and heard with regret that he was to sail the following night.

"Then we will not see you again, Captain Dean, before your departure?" said Ruth, as he arose to take his leave.

"Not unless you will all come on board to-morrow night at eight, and take a parting supper with me."

"What do you say, girls?" queried the doctor.

"I shall be delighted, I assure you, Captain Dean," responded Ruth.

"And so shall I," said Vivian, and thus it was arranged that they should take supper on board the Breeze the following evening.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AMONG THE "HEN AND CHICKENS."

THE brig-of-war Breeze set sail under auspicious circumstances, on her cruise in search of the Indian Pirate.

She was complete from keel to truck, and her men gloried in the work they had done.

Her crew had been increased by a score of good men from ashore, her stores were the best, her magazine was filled with ammunition, and, to send her off with good luck, the captain had ladies to supper to bid him god-speed, and wish him a safe and speedy return.

Ruth had seemed in good spirits, yet a trifle nervous, and she had hoped to get some opportunity to slip a note into the hand of Nick Burton, bidding him hope.

But Captain Dean had zealously guarded his prisoner from any intrusion, and had ordered the guard not to allow him to know that there were guests on board, fearing to grieve him by the knowledge.

As the guests were about to depart Coaster Tom came on board, and Captain Dean greeted him warmly and presented him to the doctor and ladies.

Tom was not at all abashed, coolly called the captain "skipper," and walked forward with the air of one who felt at home under any and all circumstances.

"Do you know how to run the brig out of the harbor, Tom?" asked Captain Dean, as the craft was ready to sail.

"Now I kin do that," was the answer, and Coaster Tom took the helm.

As if to show that the work upon her was appreciated, the beautiful vessel went flying down the harbor, Coaster Tom managing her well, and receiving the praise of Captain Dean and his crew.

As she swept by Rowland Manor, lights were shown in all the windows and thence on her way she sped like a frightened race-horse, for the wind increased as she got further away from the land.

As she reached the rolling waves of the ocean, Donald Dean gave an order to a midshipman, who disappearing below soon returned accompanied by Nick Burton.

The irons had been removed from his wrists, and he looked a free man, but the shadow of death still hung above him.

The crew looked surprised, those of them who were aft, coiling rope and getting all ship-shape, but Donald Dean gave them no time for comment, as he said:

"Mr. Burton, I sent for you to ask you to serve as pilot, as you were good enough to say that you would do so on this cruise."

"I will, sir, with pleasure," was the firm reply.

"Until we return to port you shall have the liberty of the deck, and, as I see that your young friend, Coaster Tom, knows how to handle a vessel, you can take tricks on and off with him at the wheel, for I half-suspect that his modesty alone prevented him from assuming full control when I asked it of him."

Nick bowed, while Coaster Tom said:

"Oh I kin pilot the craft, skipper, only when I has a number o' lives and a stanch vessel dependin' on me, I gits narvous, which Nick don't, and I are liable to git flustered and port when it oughter be starboard."

"But you is fixed now, fer thar stands ther darin'est pilot in these waters."

So on its way the brig swept, running by the light-house, where Nick had dwelt so happily with his mother, and the youth stood gazing upon the spot with a hard, stern look upon his face, but with a heart that was aching with sorrow.

At last the brig came to the inlet, and taking the helm Nick ran boldly in.

Through the dangerous channels she went, the condemned pilot winning the admiration of both officers and crew, and Coaster Tom standing near, explaining in his quaint way the dangers through which they passed.

"Do you see them dark objects ahead yonder, skipper?" asked Coaster Tom, an hour after midnight, as the brig was sailing along through comparatively open water.

"Yes, Tom."

"Them's the Hen and Chickens."

"Indeed?"

"Yas, so you might as well git the lads ready for fun, for we'll be among 'em afore long, and it won't take the brig long to run down to the old Hen, the mammy of ther little ones, and it will be thar thet we is to look for the Pirit Injun."

"Our way is circuitous, sir, after we pass the first island, and it may be half an hour before we reach the largest one; but see, there is a squall coming up with great rapidity," said Nick, pointing astern.

No one seemed to have noticed it before, but now all was a bustle of preparation to get the light sails in and be ready for it.

The squall soon broke, and fiercely, but the brig was held on her way by Nick Burton, and, with the waters white with foam, and the night grown strangely black with storm-clouds, the Breeze darted into the dangerous channels among the Hen and Chicken Islands.

As she did so, Coaster Tom stepped up to the wheel and took hold, saying quietly:

"I'll lend you a hand, Nick."

"Thank you, Tom," was the reply, and then came in a low tone:

"We are not far from the Hen, Nell, so do you think you are equal to take the brig in this blow?"

"Yes, indeed, for I'll run her straight for Cedar Harbor."

"It would be best, for the night looks ugly, and there are some wicked rocks in these waters."

"I know them all, Nick."

"So I am aware; but I hate to leave you as I have to do."

"Alive, you can prove your innocence, and find your poor mother; dead, you never can," was the significant reply.

"Alas! that is true and I'll take the leap for liberty."

"God bless you, Nell, and farewell."

As he spoke, Nick Burton put the wheel hard down, and the brig swept sharply around a huge black rock upon its starboard side, and over which the waters were breaking in fury.

Then he checked her swinging bow, and called out in a ringing voice:

"Steady as you are."

"Steady!" answered Coaster Tom, whom the reader now knows to be none other than Island Nell, and then came in clear tones:

"Captain Dean, better the sea than the gallows; but I leave your vessel in safe hands," and, with a bound Nick Burton went over the stern into the raging waters, while a shout of alarm broke from all who saw his act.

CHAPTER XLVII.

COASTER TOM AT THE WHEEL.

NEVER in her life had Island Nell, whom the reader now knows in her well-played part as Coaster Tom, a country fisher lad, experienced such a pang of joy as she did when Nick Burton went over the stern of the brig-of-war Breeze.

True, the skies were dark with storm-clouds, the sea was lashed into foam by the winds, and the brig was in a most dangerous channel, while the bold swimmer was quite a long distance from the island he intended to swim for, an especially long distance on such a night.

But Island Nell felt perfect confidence in his powers as a swimmer, while, as for the brig, she never felt a dread, knowing her own skill, nerve and knowledge of the waters would carry her through all right.

When the cry of Nick Burton rung out, Captain Dean, his officers and crew stood for an instant paralyzed.

They saw in that instant the total destruction of the Breeze, and death to themselves as the result.

But Coaster Tom did not lose his nerve, and his clear voice sounded, as he put his wheel to the starboard:

"Ho there, fellers, doesn't yer see thet Nick hev deserted me, and I needs help here with this wheel, which are big enough ter turn a water-mill?"

His words awoke Donald Dean to a sense of his duty, and with a bound he was at the side of the pretended youth, while he cried:

"Bravo, my brave lad! I will aid you myself: but do you think you can run these channels or shall we luff and anchor?"

"I kin try, and Lordy! we has ter try, for thar hain't no room here ter luff, skipper, and ef we was ter shorten sail and drop anchor, the tide would swing her stern round and hop her up and down on ther reefs."

"Great God! is it as bad as that?"

"It are wuss."

"How can it be?"

"We has ter run ther channels, or go ter pieces."

"And you think you are equal to it?"

"Oh! I knows ther way, if ther brig minds me when I calls on her."

"But how can you see in this darkness?"

"I feels."

"To think that Nick Burton would have deserted me thus!" said Captain Dean reproachfully.

"Oh, he's all right."

"To leave me as he did?"

"Certain, for he know'd that I knew these waters."

"But you said you did not."

"I didn't say that, skipper. I said as how I know'd 'em, but didn't want ter do the pilotin', seein' as I'd never run a big vessel through; but now I is in fer it, I intends ter put ther brig through. But don't you talk to me now, unless yer wants yer brig ter go ter knocking rocks ter pieces with her keel."

Donald Dean took the hint, and stood grasping the helm firmly, while he kept his eyes upon the strange being by his side rather than on the vessel.

He saw that they were certainly in a most dangerous situation.

The largest island, known as the Hen, had been passed, and they were in the midst of what were called the "Chickens."

Of these there were more than a score scattered here and there, and a few of them nothing more than huge rocks, while others were larger and had small forests upon them.

Between them, in a circuitous way, the channel ran, with here and there a rock and sunken reefs, sufficient to appall the heart of a brave tar.

"Keep her steady, skipper, for she are a leetle more than my weight can handle," said Nell.

"Steady it is!" answered the deep voice of Donald Dean.

"Hard up helm!" cried Nell, and the order was obeyed.

"Hard down helm," almost immediately after came the order, and a huge rock on the starboard showed what the young pilot had avoided, while a reef to port, and wickedly near, proved that she had hit the channel fairly.

With this exhibition of their pilot's skill and nerve the crew of the brig breathed more freely.

Thus the brig plunged on for an hour, and then arose an island dead ahead.

She was on the starboard tack, and her course was such as to carry her right upon the island unless it was changed.

"Skipper, we is headin' right for the entrance to a leetle harbor."

"Yes, Tom."

"It is in that harbor you must look for the Injun Pirit."

"Ha!"

"Yas, and you better get your men at their guns, for we'll be thar in less than fifteen minutes."

"To your guns, lads!" shouted Donald Dean, and then he asked, with the respect he might have shown an old, gray-haired pilot:

"Shall I shorten sail, Tom?"

"Not until we pass through the reef, skipper."

"And then?"

"Strip her of everything but working sails and git ready for a row, if the Injun Pirit is thar," was the cool response.

A moment after the brig-of-war Breeze swept through the reef, her sails were taken in, her crew went to their guns, and a short while after she glided into the little land-locked harbor.

In the darkness no vessel could be seen there.

"Burn a blue light!" came the order.

It was obeyed, and the dark, rocky shores, pine-clad and forbidding were revealed.

But there was no Indian Pirate there!

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

WHEN Nick Burton sprung into the sea, he knew the desperate chances that he took for life.

The waters were wild, the darkness was great, and the island he intended to swim to was fully a hundred yards distant.

It was a hard struggle, in those rough waters, and in the teeth of a gale, but he at last reached the shore, and panting, sunk down to rest.

"Pale-face make big swim."

"Heap great brave of sea," said a voice near him, and he started to his feet to behold two forms before him.

At a glance, even in the darkness, he recognized them as warriors of the Kennebecs.

"Yes, I have saved my life by a hard swim; but do you come from Keno, the Kennebec chief?"

"Yes, wait for you."

"Ah! then I am in luck; but where is your chief?"

"Long way off in big sea canoe."

"His vessel?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Take pale-face to Chief Keno, if ready."

"I am ready."

They led the man across the island and stopped at the shore of a small inlet, where lay a large canoe with masts and sails.

Into this the three got and, spreading the sails close reefed, went flying away from the island.

The Indian at the tiller said, after dropping the island:

"Kennebecs know waters heap good; but pale-face know better."

"It ugly night; will pale-face take helm?"

"Yes, with pleasure, for it will give me something to do, and I was wondering at your knowing these waters so well, as I hardly supposed your chief could pilot them in a night like this."

With this Nick took the little tiller, and being told that the Indian Pirate's schooner awaited them in the harbor of Monument Rock Island, he headed in that direction.

The sun was up when he ran into the little haven and beheld the two schooners lying at anchor side by side.

The Indian crew were seen to be busy on board, working at the rigging and guns of the schooner that they had so cleverly cut out of the harbor of Portland, and alongside of this craft Nick ran the canoe.

The tall form of the Indian Pirate was standing at the gangway to greet him, and he extended his hand warmly, while he said:

"My pale-face brother is welcome, and he is to be my prisoner guest, that if my vessel is captured by my enemies, he may not be said to be one of my pirate crew."

"Let him feel at home, but he has no duty on board here, and is at liberty to leave when he so wishes."

"I thank you, chief, for all that you have done for me, and if you seek revenge against those who have slain your people, I do not blame you."

"I will gladly stay with you, and, imposing upon your kindness, will ask you to still further serve me in a plan I have in view, and by so doing you can avenge your people."

"The Kennebec is your friend, so command him as you will."

"But you are wet, tired and hungry, so come with me into the cabin."

Nick did so, and found dry clothes ready for him, a glass of liquor to warm his blood,

and a tempting breakfast, all having been gotten ready for him when he was sighted coming in the canoe.

The chief explained that he intended to use Monument Island as a rendezvous, leaving the smaller schooner there, and then go on a cruise in the larger one, to which he was then transferring the guns of the smaller craft.

Nick partook heartily of his breakfast, and threw himself into the bunk assigned him to gain the rest he so much needed, and was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke the waves were dashing against the vessel's sides, and it was far into the afternoon.

Hastening on deck he saw that the schooner was out at sea and running along the coast, heading toward Portland harbor.

Seaward a large vessel-of-war was seen, heading toward the coast with an evident desire to have a better look at the schooner.

But the war-vessel was still a long way off.

The Indian crew were about the decks, silent, stern and ready for duty, while their chief was standing near the wheel, gazing at the strange sail.

He greeted Nick pleasantly, and pointed to the large vessel.

"Yes, my eyes fell upon her as soon as I reached the deck.

"If we did not know this coast, she might give us trouble, if she is fast."

"Yes," was the laconic response of the chief.

"Where is your destination now?"

"Light-house Rock."

"I thank you— Hal! there is a vessel running out from the land astern of us. As I live, it is the brig-of-war Breeze!"

"It is the brig," said the chief, quietly glancing astern at the vessel, which was fully a league and a half distant.

"And by Heaven! there is a third craft, and a war vessel too, just coming out of Portland harbor," said Nick.

The chief turned quickly and beheld the third vessel.

It was a sloop-of-war, and she had changed her course, upon sighting the large war-vessel out at sea, and the schooner close inshore, and her object seemed to form a closer acquaintance with the smaller craft.

"They are both Americans; for I see their colors; and we know well what the brig is," said Nick.

"Yes."

"They have us pretty well hemmed in, chief."

"Yes."

"But night is coming on, and with it a storm, so we have little to fear from them."

"The sloop-of-war has a pilot," said the chief, as he saw the vessel which had just come out of the harbor, maneuvering in a manner that told him the one at her helm knew the coast.

"Yes, and the corvette must have two, or she'd not stand inshore with that storm driving down from seaward, and night coming on."

"We know that the brig has a pilot," said Keno the Kennebec with a smile.

"Yes, Island Nell, and there is not a better one on this coast."

"If Nell was my enemy I would fear the brig, for she could follow us, storm or no storm, day or night, with her at the helm."

"Yes, but the Sea Flower is our friend," was the calm reply of the Kennebec chief, as his little vessel held on her way between three fires.

CHAPTER XLIX.

RUNNING THE DEATH GANTLET.

THE prophecy of Nick Burton, that the storm would follow the darkness was a true one for the clouds rolled up viciously as the sun neared the western horizon, and the waves grew rougher and wilder.

The brig-of-war Breeze, seemed to have recognized the situation of affairs the soonest, and began to signal to the large corvette far out at sea.

An answering signal came from the corvette, and then the brig turned her attention to the sloop-of-war.

"She is signaling that you are the Indian Pirate," said Nick, reading the signals with his glass.

"Yes," answered the Kennebec in his quiet way.

"The corvette signals that they have you hemmed in beyond all escape."

"Yes."

"The sloop now signals that the three must drive you to a corner, and force your surrender."

"Yes."

"They are still signaling, but it is too dark to read them now."

"Yes, too dark; but see, the three set lights."

"Yes, that is to show each other just where they are in the darkness."

"Let us burn light too."

"And thus let them see our whereabouts?" asked Nick in surprise.

"Yes."

"Why should we?"

"We all right."

"We are in a dangerous part of the coast, for we are pretty well hemmed in here."

"No."

"Yes, for there is no escape for leagues just here, without running the gantlet of the fire of either the sloop or the brig."

"Were we further up the coast near the light-house, we would be all right."

"All right here."

"How do you mean? I cannot see what you intend to do."

"Remember big rock island?"

"The one they call Gibraltar?"

"Yes."

"The reef is there."

"So I know, and the pass through it is not thirty feet wide, and there is not depth of more than six feet."

"More now. Big ship went on reef one night, year ago, in storm. Ship loaded with iron, and drove bow on before gale, and it broke reef open underneath keel."

"You don't mean it, chief?"

"Yes, deep water there now, twenty feet."

"Then we can pass through; but, as I never knew a craft could run the reef, I did not study the locality, so cannot pilot you through."

"Keno knows," was the quiet response.

"Then we will have to risk the Death Gantlet; for such it will be, or be taken."

"Death sure if taken."

"You are right, and a rope for all of us."

"But see, the three vessels are now about equal distance from us, and it is not more than a league."

"No, three ship's league away, land league and half."

"Soon know all, for storm almost here."

The storm was almost upon them, and soon after broke.

But the four vessels were prepared to meet it, the schooner luffing up short, lying to, and showing her lights defiantly.

It was a thrilling spectacle, and appalling scene.

The wild coast, indented here and there, bold, precipitous, dangerous in the extreme, a little over a league from where the Indian Pirate was lying to.

The large corvette half a league from the schooner, to seaward, and coming directly down upon her, burning bright lights to mark her position well to the other ships.

On one side a little further off from the coast than was the schooner, came the brig-of-war under reefed sails, and evidently anxious to close with the Indian Pirate before the others came up.

Upon the other quarter came the sloop-of-war, perhaps a little further off than was the brig from the Indian Pirate, and her lights glimmering and dancing as she flew along under reefed sails.

With the Indian Pirate thus hemmed in, and with a frowning coast astern, it seemed to be sure death for her.

Above the skies were black as ink, and the winds went howling overhead, whistling through the rigging like the loud wailing of human voices.

The sea reflected the blackness of the clouds, except when the waves broke in snowy foam.

Lying to, the schooner rode the rough waters like a thing of life, and in utter defiance, showed the same lights below and aloft that her foe did.

It seemed evident to those upon the schooner that the three vessels-of-war had

good pilots on board, or they would never dare rush down upon the coast as they did; or was the desire to capture the famous Indian Pirate above all fear of the risks they ran?

So it seemed certainly.

Had the Indian Pirate seen that his case was desperate, and thus lay to as a token of surrender, showing his lights to point out his locality?

Such was the question asked by all on the different vessels, and the answer was in the affirmative.

Then it became a question as to which craft would seize the prize, and all three crowded on in hot haste.

Nearer and nearer they came, until less than a mile separated the three of them.

"Must go now," calmly said the Indian Pirate, and turning to Nick he said:

"Will my pale-face brother take wheel?"

"With pleasure; but you are to be the pilot?"

"Yes, Keno go forward," and the Indian chief walked hastily forward, while Nick sprung to the wheel.

They knew, all of them, the desperate danger they ran, and a silence was upon the crew of stolid-faced Indians, as their chief sprung upon the bowsprit, and holding to the stay above his head, took his perilous stand to guide the destinies of his vessel.

"All ready!" he shouted, and Nick gave the order to let the schooner fall off to the wind.

It was promptly obeyed, and then she swept round swiftly, and, with reefed sails, darted straight for the land.

Nearer and nearer she drew to the bold shore, and soon the black rock, jutting out from the mainland like a huge island, towered up directly in her course.

The act of the schooner, so wholly unexpected, took the crews of the three vessels aback, while Nell, who was standing by the helm of the brig, and did not know of the existence of a deep channel through the reefs, cried out excitedly:

"If he attempts that pass he is lost!"

"He is driven to madness by his fear of capture, and prefers to lose his vessel and the lives of his crew, to being taken and perish at the rope end; but run in after him as far as you dare, Tom, and forward there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Clear those bow guns and open on yonder schooner!" cried Captain Dean.

"Ay, ay, sir," and soon after there burst forth red flame from the brig's bows, and the roar of heavy guns mingled with the thunder.

The sloop-of-war also began to fire at the schooner, and soon after the corvette followed suit.

But it was impossible to take aim in that rough sea, and the Indian Pirate flew on unhurt, and soon came almost under the shadow of the huge rock island.

"Now, ready!" he shouted back in his trumpet tones, as the reef was almost under the bows.

"Ready, sir!" answered Nick Burton, calm and full of nerve, as he stood with a firm grip upon the wheel.

Another moment and the desperate danger was upon them.

A mistaken order from the pilot, a moment of hesitation from the helmsman, and the schooner would dash to her destruction, her crew go to instant death.

It was certainly an appalling moment, and yet not a lip quivered upon that gallant little schooner, though their foes were pouring in a terrible fire, the shot were flying above them and about them, and death seemed to be crouching in their pathway, while the black clouds frowned down upon them, the sea dashed spray into their faces, and the thunder muttered disapprobation at men daring to brave Fate as they were then doing.

There stood the Indian Buccaneer, calm and fearless, clinging to the stay above his head, his feet firmly planted upon the bowsprit, while he piloted his gallant craft through the very jaws of death.

One appalling instant of suspense, and then came the thrilling cry from forward:

"Luff sharp! for your life, pale-face, luff!"

"Sharp luff it is, sir," came back the response from Nick Burton, and obeying her helm with the rapidity of lightning, the

schooner shied away, like a frightened steed, from a ragged reef end upon her starboard, and then, with a mighty plunge, forged through the vortex of waters into safety beyond.

Not a word came from her dusky, silent crew, and leaving his station on the bowsprit, the Indian Pirate came aft, as, rounding the huge rock, she shot into a basin in the island-locked bay beyond, where suddenly loomed up a vessel in full view, lying snugly at anchor and riding out the storm, having evidently reached her place of security from the inner waters and not from the sea.

A flash of lightning at this moment revealed the craft distinctly, and Nick Burton shouted:

"It is the craft of Burke, the Buccaneer! Stand ready, boarders! All ready to lay her aboard!"

The next instant the Indian Pirate swept up into the wind, and, skillfully handled, was laid alongside of the surprised enemy, while upon his decks the red-skin crew poured with irresistible force and yells that were appalling to their foes, and they rushed upon deck in wild dismay.

CHAPTER L.

A STRANGE STORY.

THE harbor of Portland looked quite lively, the second afternoon following the night of storm, for three vessels-of-war lay at anchor there, and many coasters were preparing to put to sea, as the news had been brought in by the cruisers that the Indian Pirate had been driven to destruction upon the coast, when she had preferred death to capture.

With the three cruisers in port and the Indian Pirate wrecked, the merchant vessels were anxious to go to sea, and the harbor was a busy scene.

Seated upon the piazza of Rowland Manor were a group of six persons.

They were the doctor, Ruth and Vivian, Captain Dean and the commanders of the corvette and sloop-of-war, which had joined in the pursuit of the Indian Pirate.

Donald Dean had told the story of the springing overboard of Nick Burton, to meet a death in the sea rather than on the gallows, and how Coaster Tom had taken the helm and proven a most skillful and daring pilot, running the brig through many dangers, and at last gaining open sea water, to discover the schooner sailing quietly along and the corvette and the sloop-of-war also in view.

That the Indian Pirate had dashed to destruction none doubted, and that Nick Burton was dead all believed with one exception.

That exception was Ruth.

She looked white-faced and really stern, and yet she could not be brought to believe that Nick Burton was dead.

She had heard of his superb powers as a swimmer, and knowing that the brig was near an island when he sprung into the sea, she hoped against hope that he yet lived.

This hope alone kept her up, for she knew now how deeply she loved the young sailor.

"There comes a schooner-of-war," suddenly cried Ruth, as she took her glass from her eye, having had it turned seaward for some time.

"My stolen schooner, as I live!" cried Donald Dean springing to his feet.

"Do you mean the one the Pirate cut out?" asked Vivian.

"Yes, and see, there comes a second one into view, and it is the craft the Indian Pirate captured up the coast and ran in here with to cut my schooner out."

"What does this mean?"

No one could answer his question, and a moment after a third schooner shot into sight, following in the wake of the other two.

"Burke the Buccaneer! by all that's sinful!" shouted Donald Dean, and he was hastily excusing himself, with his brother officer to go to their respective ships, when Ruth cried:

"They are all flying white flags at the fore and peak."

"Correct you are, Miss Ruth; but this adds to the mystery, for I dreamed that they were coming into port to clear out the harbor; but I'll wait an instant and see what they'll do when they discover the three cruisers in port, which they must soon do."

In silence all waited, and when the schooners reached a point where they could command the harbor, they still held on, all of them gradually lowering sail.

"Doctor, let us go to your boat-house and hail them, ordering them to anchor off there, for the fort seems satisfied with their peaceful intentions, and our cruisers are ready for them."

"Let us solve this remarkable mystery."

Doctor Rowland said faintly:

"You go, gentlemen, while I remain here with the ladies," and he was very pale.

But this was not noticed, and being urged, the doctor, Ruth and Vivian accompanied the three officers to the shore.

The leading schooner was now nearly off the boat-house, and luffing up, dropped anchor, the other two forging on into good anchorages and doing likewise.

It was now seen that the crews on the three vessels were all Indians, and that hardly more than a dozen were on each.

From the side of the largest schooner, a boat now shot out, manned by four Indian oarsmen, and in the stern-sheets was none other than Nick Burton.

The crowd recognized him in amazement, and remained in breathless silence awaiting his approach.

Springing upon the pier he raised his hat politely, and addressing Donald Dean, said:

"Captain Dean, I have returned, sir, to report that, with the aid of Kennebec, the Indian Pirate, as he is called, I have captured the schooner of Burke, the Buccaneer."

"I made my escape from you, because I wished to live to prove my innocence of the crime I was charged with, and thank Heaven I can do so."

"I was picked up by the Indian Pirate, and you know how you sighted us at sea, and, with the corvette and sloop-of-war hemmed us in, and thought doubtless you had driven us to destruction."

"But the Kennebec saved his vessel from both capture and wreck, and, in the haven we sought, we found at anchor yonder schooner, which was commanded by Burke the Buccaneer."

"I laid our schooner alongside, and we captured the pirates after a fierce fight in which the Indian Pirate was wounded."

"What became of Burke the Buccaneer I do not know, and we could find no trace of him, though we made diligent search."

"The next day we sailed to Monument Rock and got the schooner yonder, which the Indian Pirate just captured, and which, I am glad to say, he took from a party of outlaws, and not a Government crew."

"Then we set sail for this port, for it was those outlaws, and not Government troops, or sailors, who massacred the people of the brave chief, so he wishes peace with you now."

"What has become of his little daughter we cannot find out, any more than we can regarding the fate of Buccaneer Burke; but, upon our way here, I looked over the papers of Burke, the Buccaneer, and I regret to say it, I discovered that he was my kinsman, and more, that he is the brother of Doctor Rowland's wife."

"It is a startling truth, but Doctor Rowland protected him on that account, though he did not know that I was related to the pirate."

"And still worse, let me tell you, and which I have from the lips of the pirate crew:

"Burke, the Buccaneer, murdered my mother, and he it was, to get me out of his way, that wrote that letter, forging my poor mother's handwriting, and leaving it there to criminate me."

"Gentlemen, I have proof of what I say, and I ask you, am I any longer branded with the crime of piracy?"

"Am I any longer under the shadow of the gallows?"

CHAPTER LI.

CONCLUSION.

KIND reader, need it be told, when the proofs of Nick Burton's innocence were known to all, that the charge laid at his door was quickly raised, and that he became an injured man in the eyes of all who had believed him guilty, and was made the recipient of just homage as a hero?

No, I need hardly tell all this, or how the

Indian Pirate was quickly pardoned for what he had done, and, with the prize-money received for his capture of the outlaws' schooner, and then the craft of Burke the Buccaneer, how he purchased one of the trim vessels and went on a cruise in hopes of finding his lost daughter, for, though all else believed her to be dead, he would not so believe, and set sail to try and find her, at the same time making a coast trader of his vessel, that his crew might not become disheartened.

Nick Burton, for the wrong that had been done him, and the capture of Burke the Buccaneer's schooner, was rewarded with a commission in the navy, which he accepted with joy, for the rank, and his fortune in prize-money, placed him on a level with Ruth Rowland, whose acknowledged lover he soon became before the eyes of all, though it sent poor Donald Dean to foreign seas on a long cruise to try and drown his sorrows in busy action, away from the maiden he so madly loved.

Vivian Moreland, unwilling to leave her idolized friend Ruth, accepted the proffered hand and heart of Doctor Rowland and became his wife, while Nick Burton hoped to claim his sweetheart as his bride at the same time; but this Doctor Rowland, though setting the example, would not hear to, and told the young couple they must wait for a couple of years before that interesting event came to pass.

And Island Nell?

Poor girl! after her daring rescue of Nick Burton from the gallows she discovered that he loved another, and it so crushed her young heart in grief that, taking her old grandfather with her in their little smack, she fled from the scenes of her wretchedness; but whither, no one knew, though some said she had gone to certain death out in the sea, as she had last been seen sailing into the very teeth of a furious gale, as though seeking an end of her woes beneath the blue waters she so dearly loved and so little feared.

Thus the curtain is let fall upon the scenes of action of long ago, and those who were actors therein, and who, I hope, became loved and hated by my readers as their characters deserved.

THE END.

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